

Miracles of Healing

I suspect that the first thing most of us think about when we hear the word “miracle” has something to do with physical healing, and the truth of the matter is that much of the healing that we enjoy through modern medicine is, in the last analysis, very nearly miraculous. While there is much that we do understand, there are also many cases in which physicians know that certain medicines and procedures work, but they don’t always know why or how they work.

At the same time, while most healing may be understandable in principle, I suspect that many of us have known of situations in which spontaneous remission of disease has occurred in ways for which the attending physicians had no explanation. Larry Dossey, former Medical Chief of Staff of Humana Medical City Dallas, wrote that “*Every* physician, in the course of practicing clinical medicine, becomes a collector of bizarre observations, cases that do not fit the norm, that he or she files away secretly over the years.”¹

Further, Dr. Dossey wrote that “Sickly saints and healthy sinners show us that there is no invariable, linear, one-to-one relationship between one’s level of spiritual attainment and the degree of one’s physical health.”² While they were not God’s original purpose for creation, until the New Creation comes, sickness and disease will continue to affect the fallen creation, including those who follow Jesus.

Jesus didn’t heal everyone He met. Neither did Paul, and neither did the early Apostles. And when Jesus healed a man born blind (John 9:1-3), He indicated that there are sometimes purposes for illness that we can’t understand. While *the time will come* when God speaks a new creation into being, a creation that will have no more death or sorrow or crying or pain (Revelation 21:4), until that Day comes, God grants us no immunity from sickness and sorrow in a sin-shattered world.

One frequently-cited passage about healing that needs to be considered is this one from James: “*Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven*” (James 5:14-15).

The last page of this document will examine these verses in more detail, but one important thing to remember is that James, the half-brother of the Lord, who wrote these words, apparently died a martyr’s death for his confession that Jesus was alive again after His crucifixion.³ That in itself demonstrates that this promise is not a blanket guarantee that it is not God’s purpose for Christians to suffer.

The truth of the matter is that God frequently uses our sickness, pain, and sorrow to teach us more about Himself and about the deep things of faith. And as we struggle through such times, Calvary’s Cross gives eloquent witness to the fact that God is for us, not against us.

While God can and does use miraculous healing for His own purposes—usually as a witness to unbelievers—most of the time Christians experience similar illnesses to unbelievers. Remember that when Paul begged God to remove his “thorn in the flesh,” God told him, “*My gracious favor is all you need. **My power works best in your weakness***” (2 Corinthians 12:9). When Paul wrote to Timothy, “*I left Trophimus sick in Miletus*” (2 Timothy 4:20), he was telling us a great deal about how God works.

¹ Larry Dossey, M.D., *Healing Words: The Power of Prayer and the Practice of Medicine* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), p. 38. We are enjoined to prayer and even anointing with oil in prayer for physical healing (James 5:14-16), which may explain some such occurrences. Nevertheless, it is clear that God does not intend for all illness to be healed in this life, and that death itself is our Final Healing.

² Dossey, p. 15.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_the_Just

The fact is that while our testimonies to God's wondrous power do sometimes include inexplicable physical healing, we're called on far more often to give testimony to God's goodness, grace, and power while we're suffering. That's what unbelievers want to see as they watch our lives.

It's certainly not wrong to pray for healing, and when I'm sick or when persons I love are sick, that's what I'm going to do. At the same time, I hope that I'll be able to face such troubles as Jesus faced the Cross. In that situation, Jesus asked for what He wanted while also submitting Himself to the Father's purposes: "*My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. **Yet not as I will, but as you will***" (Matthew 26:39).

I'm also challenged by Jesus' words, "*Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. **Father, glorify your name!***" (John 12:27).

The obvious fact is that every single one of us is going to die, and there will be some mechanism—perhaps sickness—by which death comes. And while this is true, the Empty Tomb continues to remind us that all of our life on this earth is just the preface to the Real Story that lies beyond the grave.

As Paul put it, "*Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. **For when I am weak, then I am strong***" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

The Question of Anointing with Oil for Healing

Anointing as a sign of holiness:

“Use this oil also to anoint Aaron and his sons, sanctifying them so they can minister before me as priests” (Exodus 30:30).

Anointing as a sign of God’s approval, selection, and blessing

“So Jesse sent for him. He was ruddy and handsome, with pleasant eyes. And the Lord said, ‘This is the one; anoint him’” (1 Samuel 16:12).

“You welcome me as a guest, anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings” (Ps. 23:5).

Anointing as a means of physical healing

“He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him” (Luke 10:34).

Not every sickness comes from sin (John 9:1-5); but some does (1 Cor. 11:30).

It is the *Power* behind the **Name** that heals: Acts 3:16, 9:32-34

Similar to our Pastors and Deacons

“Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. And their prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make them well. And anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results” (James 5:14-16).

Symbolic: not rubbed or poured, as might be done with medicine

The ministry of intercession

Not confession through a required intermediary, such as a Catholic priest, but to a brother or sister priest. Also not “extreme unction”—this prayer is for healing, not for death.

For the Christian, every illness is healed, but this healing sometimes comes through physical death. It is not physical healing that is promised (2 Timothy 4:20).

The Mystery of the Body-Mind-Spirit Connection