

# Christ Our Healer

## A Position Paper

### Jesus' Healing Ministry

Jesus Christ came from heaven, suffered, died and rose again, not just to save us from the penalty and power of sin, but also from the effects of sin.

A great portion of Christ's earthly ministry was dedicated to healing the sick. He healed all kinds of people of all kinds of diseases: the blind, the paralyzed, the lame, the deaf, lepers, those who had fevers, and many with chronic illnesses. We find no record in the Gospels of Jesus turning anyone away who came to him for healing, nor do we find that any disease was too difficult for him to heal. He even raised the dead.

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he announced what he had come to do. In the synagogue in Nazareth, where he had grown up, he read from Isaiah 61:

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

He concluded his reading by saying, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:18-21 NIV). Healing was part of what he came to do.

Matthew's Gospel describes many incidents of Jesus' healing ministry. In one particular passage he says:

*When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases" (Matthew 8:16-17 NIV).*

The passage that Matthew quotes is from Isaiah 53, which describes the atoning ministry of the Suffering Servant, God's Anointed One:

*He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:3-5 NIV)*

This passage tells us that Christ's atoning work is not only to bear our iniquities and transgressions, but also our "infirmities" (which some versions translate as "sicknesses") and our "sorrows" (which can be translated as "diseases"). Some have spiritualized this passage to interpret this as referring to spiritual maladies, not physical ones, but Matthew applies it to physical healing.

The apostle Peter quotes this passage, not only citing Christ's saving ministry, but his healing ministry as well. *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed (1 Peter 2:24 NIV).* Healing is part of Christ's atoning work.

## **The Relationship of Salvation and Healing**

To understand the relationship between salvation and healing, we need to look at the relationship of sin and illness. God created mankind in his own image and likeness (Genesis 1:27). After creating mankind, “*God saw all that he had made, and it was very good*” (Genesis 1:31 NIV). What God created, including mankind, was perfect. Adam and Eve were placed in a perfect environment to enjoy perfect fellowship with their Creator, while they served in a fulfilling occupation by taking care of God’s creation. It is reasonable to believe that they also enjoyed perfect health.

However, mankind’s disobedience, as recorded in Genesis 3, changed all that. Mankind lost their perfect environment, and their perfect fellowship because they sinned. Taking care of creation became a chore, not a joy. Death, both physical and spiritual, entered the human race as a consequence of their disobedience. Part of the “death sentence” must also be illness, which can lead to physical death. After the fall, people began to get sick and die.

Though not every individual illness is the direct result of an act of sin, the ultimate source of illness is a consequence of mankind’s sin. Jesus came to save us from the penalty of our sins, but also from the effects of our sins—illness.

## **Healing in the Old Testament**

Throughout the Old Testament we see the Lord as the Healer, as well as the Savior of His people. To the Israelites, even before the Law was given, God revealed Himself as *I am the LORD, who heals you* (Exodus 15:26 (NIV)). Abraham prayed for the healing of Abimelech and his household (Genesis 20:17). Moses prayed for the healing of his sister, Miriam (Numbers 12:13). Elijah and Elisha were instruments of God to heal people (1 Kings 17:20-23; 2 Kings 4:32-37; 5:1-15). King Hezekiah was deathly ill. He prayed for healing, and his health was restored, and fifteen years was added to his life (2 Kings 20:1-11). The ministry of healing is not just a New Testament phenomenon, nor is it limited to the Covenant of the Law. One of the last promises in the Old Testament is one of healing: *But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings* (Malachi 4:2 NIV).

## **The Healing Ministry of Jesus’ Followers**

Jesus not only had the power to heal, but he also gave his disciples authority to heal in His name (Matthew 10:1). Some think that this authority was given only to the Twelve. Luke records that Jesus also authorized seventy-two unnamed disciples to preach and heal as well (Luke 10:1, 9). Healing is part of the commission that Jesus gave His disciples before His ascension, as recorded in Mark 16:15-18.

The apostles, as they began their ministry after they were filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, began healing people in Jesus’ name (Acts 3:1-10; 5:12, 15-16; 9:32-43). The apostles were careful to proclaim that Jesus Christ is the healer, and not take the credit themselves (Acts 4:8-12; 9:34).

But it wasn’t just the twelve apostles who had a healing ministry, but other believers as well: Stephen (Acts 6:8) and Philip (Acts 8:5-8), were table servers (deacons); Ananias, a believer in Damascus (Acts 9:17-19). Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and others were also instruments of Christ’s healing power (Acts 14:8-10; 16:16-18; 19:11-12; 20:7-12; 28:7-10).

## Two Kinds of Healing

It should be pointed out that the New Testament seems to indicate two types of healings: miraculous healings, and the quiet ministry of healing within the church body. Miraculous healings draw attention to the gospel message resulting in numbers of people believing in Christ. The healing of the lame man (Acts 3:1-10) brought a crowd of people, to which Peter preached, resulting in the congregation growing to 5000 (Acts 4:4). Healings in Philip's ministry in Samaria made people pay attention to his message (Acts 8:4-8). The extraordinary miracles and healings in Paul's ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:11-12) resulted in word of the Lord spreading widely in that region (Acts 19:17-20). Miraculous healings are still occurring today, many times in parts of the world where the gospel is being preached for the first time. It is a demonstration of God's great power to unbelieving people.

The ministry of healing within the local congregation is what A. B. Simpson used to call the "Lord for the Body," whose purpose is to build up the believers. The Holy Spirit gives gifts of healing (1 Corinthians 12:9, 28) for this type of ministry. The purpose of all spiritual gifts is to edify, strengthen, and comfort the church (1 Corinthians 14:3, 5, 12, 26). The use of the gifts of healing should contribute to the building up of the church.

## The Ministry of Healing in the Local Congregation

James gives the following instructions for the healing ministry in the local congregation:

*Is any of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (James 5:14-16 NIV).*

The elders of the church should oversee the ministry of healing in the local body. They are usually the most mature believers in the congregation.

There is nothing "magical" in anointing with oil. It is simply a symbol of the Holy Spirit, who applies the work of Christ in the life of the believer.

Prayer and faith in Christ our Healer must be exercised together, both by the person seeking healing and the elders who are administering it. James also says that confession of sin is necessary when ministering healing, because harboring sin will keep a person from experiencing God's blessing of healing. Obedience to God is one of the conditions for healing.

*If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees. I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD who heals you (Exodus 15:26 NIV).*

## Frequently Asked Questions about Healing

Does Christ still heal today? Yes. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever* (Hebrews 13:8 NIV). His power to heal has never decreased.

Is everyone healed who follows James' instructions? No, not everyone, but many are. Healing may come gradually or it can come instantly. The believer needs to learn to draw on Christ's healing strength day by day, and to use his/her new strength to serve the Lord. Christ does not heal so that we will feel good, but so that He will be glorified (John 9:3; 11:4).

Why are godly people not always healed? Healing, like any other work of God, is a sovereign, supernatural act of His grace. God does not exist to fulfill our demands or requests, but rather we need to discern God's will and pray according to what we believe that He wants to do (1 John 5:14-15).

Is it wrong to take medication or seek medical help? No. God has given men and women great understanding of the human body, diseases, and cures of various kinds. However, the ultimate question is, in what are you trusting? Are you trusting in medical science and the skill of physicians, or are you trusting in Christ as your Healer?