



# Jesus the Healer

Exodus 15:22-27

## Introduction

This well-known passage in Exodus 15 gives us one of the compound names of God – Jehovah Rapha: ‘I am the God who heals you’. This, along with all the other ‘I am’ self-disclosures of God, reveals something of the very nature of God and shows His heart towards those who are suffering and in distress.

At the beginning of the Bible, we see God’s perfect creation and a view of life as God intended, free from the contamination of sin. When sin entered in, so did sickness, oppression and death – they didn’t originate with God, but came as the result satan’s influence and humanity’s rebellion. Life was marred by sin and the resulting decay is everywhere for us to see as we look at our fallen world today.

Throughout the Old Testament, God demonstrated His heart to see sin’s effects reversed by providing a series of covenants that brought His people close and provided them with a system for worship and a framework for society – a Kingdom order accompanied by God’s many blessings. Within these covenants were promises that the Lord Himself would be a source of health and wholeness (Exod 23:25-26; Deut 7:15; Psalm 103:1-3).



In the New Testament, we see a more perfect revelation of God’s heart in the person Jesus Christ. When Jesus returned from being tempted in the desert, He entered the synagogue and read a prophecy from the scroll of Isaiah (Luke 4:16-21). Jesus declared these words fulfilled that day and promptly demonstrated this by preaching the ‘good news’ and ‘releasing the oppressed’ throughout Galilee and the surrounding regions:

*‘Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness amongst the people.’ (Matt 4:23-24 – see also Matt 9:35)*

Jesus preached the Kingdom of God and, in doing so, pointed people to Himself – the King of Kings. Jesus came to inaugurate the Kingdom rule and reign of God on the earth and to destroy the works of the enemy in people’s lives (Acts 10:38). Every miraculous healing was a pushing-back of the kingdom of darkness and an advancing of the Kingdom of God. These signs and wonders pointed towards an unfolding reality in the here-and-now but also gave a foretaste of a greater reality to come when the present age would come to an end and God’s Kingdom would come in all its fullness. At that time, God will restore His creation this there will be no more sin, no more sickness and no more dying (Rev 21:4).

Then, when Jesus sent His disciples out in His name, He gave them authority to do what He had been doing, namely: preach the gospel, heal the sick and drive out demons (Luke 9:1-2 & Luke 10:8). Mark’s Gospel ends with this intriguing statement of what Jesus’ followers could expect in ministry:

*‘...these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.’* (Mark 16:17-18)

It appears that healing was on Jesus’ agenda both for His own ministry and the ministry of His followers. It was a ‘show and tell’ gospel!

### The big question

As believers today, we read the Bible and we know that God can heal. We may also believe that God wants to heal. The big question is ‘can we expect God always to heal?’ This is the question that many believers continue to grapple with. The key text in this discussion is Isaiah 53:4-6 – which is universally understood as a prophetic passage looking forward to the

coming Messiah. These verses describe Jesus as a man of sorrows, ‘stricken by God’, ‘afflicted’, ‘pierced’ and ‘crushed’. This describes Jesus’ death on the cross – the act known as the atonement (i.e. the shedding of Christ’s blood to pay for our sins). Isaiah talks about the positive outcome of Jesus’ death in terms of it achieving our ‘peace’ and ‘healing’:

*‘...by His wounds we are healed’* (v.5)

Most Christians are happy to interpret these verses in terms of Christ’s death bringing us spiritual healing – i.e. the forgiveness of sins and being made a new creation. This seems to be how Peter understands these verses when he quotes them in his epistle (1 Peter 2:24). But in Matthew 8:16-1, where these verses are also quoted, there does appear to be a link between the atonement and our physical healing. So what is that link?



### Three views

At this point, believers fall into three categories:

1.) those who believe that **healing today is not in the atonement** – that any act of God is healing is entirely due to His loving nature and an act of His sovereign will independently of Jesus saving work on the cross. Such healings would be referred to as an ‘un-covenanted mercy’.

2.) those who believe that **healing today is in the atonement** – that we should always expect God to heal in response to our faith because Jesus purchased our healing in the

same way He purchased our salvation. Health is therefore the right of every believer and we simply stand on God's promises and receive our healing by faith. When we pray for healing, we can know that God has already healed us; so even if we still have symptoms of sickness, we proclaim ourselves healed as a statement of faith – this is often called positive confession. To admit that you are suffering illness is to 'negatively confess' and to cut-off the flow of God's healing grace into your life. This view sees healing as an accomplished fact and it is only the unbelief of individuals that stops them receiving the healing that is already theirs in Christ.

3.) those who believe that **healing today is through the atonement**. This might sound like semantics, but the distinction is important. This view recognises that Christ's death provides the means by which we can be healed, but doesn't necessarily guarantee our healing. This leaves room for God to act sovereignly and leaves room for mystery in healing – i.e. why God heals some and not others. It also allows for a 'theology of suffering' – i.e. that God has a bigger redemptive purpose that He works out through allowing us to suffer (as he did with Job – see also James 1: 2-4).

This position recognises that our physical bodies have not been redeemed (2 Cor 5:4) and will continue to degenerate until death. This is symptomatic of living in a fallen world. Paul puts it like this:

*'Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day' (2 Cor 4:16)*

After this life, we will receive perfect resurrected bodies (1 Cor 15:42-44) and there will be no more sickness, oppression and death. In that sense, we will receive our complete healing only when we die and go to be with Jesus.

Until then, we live in a fallen world and experience the consequences of sin. We believe that God is a healing God but we sometimes have to hold that in tension with the fact that some are not healed. Colin Dye sums it up like this:

"We can ask the questions, but we can't demand the answers."

We can take comfort in the fact that even great men of God in the Bible experienced sickness – Paul (Gal 4:13-15); Timothy (1 Tim 5:23); Trophimus (2 Tim 4:20); Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25-27). This was despite the fact that they all undoubtedly saw God act powerfully through miraculous signs and wonders...including healing.

Does this mean we shouldn't ask God to heal? Not at all. Jesus preached the gospel of the Kingdom and demonstrated the Kingdom through miraculous signs and wonders that set people free. We were sent to do the same. Healing is a difficult issue, but we need to keep praying for the sick with compassion and expectancy – because one thing is for sure...if we don't pray for healing, we won't see people healed!

'All things are possible through Christ who strengthens me'!

## Life Group questions...

- 1. Have you ever experienced a healing or known anybody who has been healed by Jesus?**
- 2. Read Luke 17:11-19. What role does faith play in people being healed?**
- 3. Is it right to expect Jesus always to heal based on Isaiah 53:5? Why?**
- 4. Read Matthew 8:1-4. If Jesus is willing to heal, why do you think some people don't experience healing?**
- 5. What role can suffering play in us maturing as Christians? Can you think of any Bible passages that show how God uses suffering?**
- 6. In the DVD we watched, Colin Dye said that when we don't understand why people are not healed, 'we can ask the questions without demanding the answers'. How comfortable are you with there being 'mystery' in why God heals some but not others?**
- 7. We minister to people in partnership with the Holy Spirit...'There is no power for what God is not doing'. How can we train ourselves to pray according to Spirit's leading?**

Why not end by praying for any in the group who are in need of prayer for healing.