

**“Healed”**  
**Acts 5:12-16**  
**June 8, 2008**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

There are many passages throughout the book of Acts that talk about miraculous healings. The verses before us today describe the healing ministry of the apostle Peter, which was quite remarkable. We read that the sick were carried onto the streets and positioned in such a way that Peter’s shadow would fall upon them as he passed by. That slightest contact resulted in healing. And it was widespread, so that our author tells us that **“they were all healed.”** We read a few chapters later that Peter even raised the dead when Dorcas became ill and died (9:36-43). The apostle Paul performed similar miracles of healing, **“so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them”** (19:12). And Paul too raised someone from the dead, when Eutychus fell asleep in church and tumbled out of a third story window to his death (20:9-10).

These miraculous healings are a continuation of the earthly ministry of Jesus. Anyone reading Luke and Acts together can see the similarities between Jesus’ healing ministry and that of Peter and Paul. Luke had prepared us for this at the beginning of his book, when he says that his former book, what we call the Gospel of Luke, contains the record of what Jesus **“began to do and teach”** (1:1). By implication, Acts contains the record of those things that Jesus continued to do through the apostles and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus continued to heal through them. But how should we understand these healings today? Ought we to expect God to continue healing in such miraculous ways? I would like for us to consider these questions under the following three points.

**I. The Uncertainty of Healing**

What should we expect God to do today in this area of miraculous healing? All Christians believe that God is able to bring healing. We read of the many healings accomplished by Jesus, including raising the dead, and we bow before our mighty God. Nothing is impossible for him. And then the book of Acts continues with staggering accounts of healings, like the ones recorded in our passage. Many of the healings were like the one we looked at a few weeks ago in Acts 3, where the forty-year old man who had been crippled from birth was healed immediately. In a moment, his legs were transformed from the weak, shriveled limbs he had been burdened with for his entire life, to dancing, leaping legs. All Christians thrill at these accounts and celebrate the greatness of our God who can do such things.

Christians, however, lose their unity in answering the question of whether God continues to perform miracles today as he did in the book of Acts. There are

two opposing positions on this. One position was espoused by a 19<sup>th</sup> century Presbyterian theologian named B. B. Warfield. Warfield believed that miracles ceased after the early days of the church. He pointed out that miracles come in clusters in the Bible centered around the coming of new revelation from God. There was a cluster during the days of Moses when the law was given, another in the prophetic times of Elijah and Elisha and a third during the ministry of Jesus and the apostles. But after each one, he said, there had been a cessation. So during the wilderness wanderings of Israel for forty years, we read of the miracle of bread coming down from heaven six days a week. We also read that the clothing and sandals of the Israelites did not wear out for forty years. But as soon as they crossed the Jordan River, the bread stopped and the clothing resumed the deterioration process. Warfield would look to a passage like Hebrews 2:4 to support his view that miracles ceased with the apostles. This verse says of the apostles that God **“bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles”** that their message was authentic.

The cessationist view of Warfield also points out that the vast majority of miracles in the book of Acts were performed by the apostles. The first verse of our passage, for example, says that **“many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles”** (v. 12). So in chapter 9, when a beloved church member named Dorcas became seriously ill and died, what did the church do? They recognized that they could do nothing, but they heard that an apostle happened to be nearby. So they summoned Peter and he came and raised her from the dead.

On the opposite end from the cessationist view of B. B. Warfield is the view of a 20<sup>th</sup> century church leader named John Wimber. Wimber coined the term “power evangelism” to describe his view that miracles should be a regular, even daily part of the life of the church. He would look at passages like the one before us this morning and point out the connection between miracles and evangelism. **“And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women”** (v. 14). Looking at passages like this, he said that signs and wonders are the key to church growth.

I have to say that I find both of these positions lacking. Warfield’s cessationist position is problematic because it lacks clear Scriptural evidence saying that there are no more miracles. It must also be pointed out that not all miraculous healings in Acts were performed by apostles. Both Stephen (6:8) and Philip (8:7), deacons in the church, performed signs and wonders, though neither were apostles. There’s also the practical problem that if God no longer performs miracles, then what about the many credible claims of miraculous healings? Martyn Lloyd Jones was both a physician and a preacher. He wrote a book in 1982 called *Healing and the Scriptures* in which he catalogued healings that would be difficult to deny. Surgeons would operate on a patient with cancer. Upon opening the patient to remove the cancer, they would find it far too complicated to deal with surgically and simply close the incision without

removing any cancer. Then after prayers for healing, all signs of the cancer would be removed.

The power evangelism position of Wimber also has problems, both Scriptural and practical. It is simply not true that the book of Acts attributes the evangelistic success of the church to signs and wonders. Rather, it is attributed to the preaching of the Word. Luke spends far more time talking about the prayer and preaching of the apostles than he does talking about the signs and wonders performed by them. Further, not all are healed in the New Testament. Most famously, the apostle Paul had what he calls a **“thorn in the flesh”** (2 Cor. 12:7), almost certainly a physical ailment. He prayed that God would remove it, and God said no. When healing miracles are expected as normal and common, two practical problems develop. First, it presents a problem for explaining the lack of healing. Many today deal with that by saying that God didn’t heal because the sick person’s faith was inadequate. But that doesn’t seem to be in view in passages like this one. There was an indiscriminate quality to these healings. Note that it says in verse 16 that **“they were all healed.”** Was the apostle Paul not healed because his faith was inadequate? A second practical problem with this view is that marginalizes handicapped people, putting them in a status of second class spiritually. That goes against everything in the Bible, where Jesus elevates the weak and needy by saying that we serve him when we serve them.

The place where I have landed on this issue is between these two. God does perform miraculous healings today, often in a frontier mission situation or in a place where there has been pervasive unbelief, but also when it just pleases him to do so. If you are sick and need healing, it is good to pray for such healing. James 5 directs that the sick are to call the elders and ask them to engage in prayer and anointing for your healing. But I think it a mistake to expect immediate healing in every case. God does not promise that.

## **II. The Certainty of Healing**

Let’s talk some about the positive side of healing miracles in the Bible. It is significant that Jesus came bringing healing, and that his apostles also did the same. The coming of God’s kingdom is good news in every area of life. Over and over again, both in the Old and New Testaments, God promises healing. Isaiah 53:5 does indeed say, **“by his stripes we are healed.”** Admittedly, though, there is some tension in this. Clearly, not all ailments are healed in this life, even among the most Spirit-filled, faith-filled people. Theologians deal with this tension in a hard-to-understand way, using big words that are incomprehensible to average people. But all of you are above average, and I think you can understand these words. Are you ready for this? When theologians talk about the timing of the kingdom, they talk about the “already-not yet” nature of the kingdom. There are aspects of the kingdom that are already in place, but aspects that are not yet in place as fully as they will one day be. Healing fits into this already-not yet

category. There are miraculous healings today, but they are not yet as complete as they will one day be.

The “not yet” quality of the kingdom of God is full of hope. If you are fifteen years old and you ask your parents for a car, there is a big difference between a “No” answer and a “Not yet” answer. Not yet means that they will give you one at some point in the future, perhaps, you hope, when you turn 16 and get your license. When we ask for healing, God never gives a “No” answer. It is always either “Yes” or “Not yet.” Everything in our lives will be healed. Think with me about this for just a moment. All physical illnesses will be healed. The pain will one day go away and never return again. The paraplegics will one day have their legs strengthened so that they will dance and leap out of pure joy, unable to contain themselves. My color-blindness will one day be healed. Wendy suffers from a painful, arthritic-like condition known as Ankylosing spondylitis. It involves a host of painful, undesirable symptoms that she struggles with on a daily basis. The day will come when it will be no more. It may be in this life (and we do pray for healing) or in the life to come. But it will come. The last chapter of the Old Testament, looking ahead to the kingdom to be brought by the coming Messiah, says that on the day the kingdom comes the **“sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall”** (Mal. 4:2). Not only will there be physical healing, but emotional healing as well. You can’t make it through life without some emotional scarring. We live in a fallen world, and all of us have been sinned against and have suffered emotionally as a result. So often, despite our level of spiritual maturity, we carry these scars with us for the rest of our lives. But when the kingdom of God fully comes, these emotional injuries will be completely healed, never to return. And we will be healed spiritually. Did you notice that Luke distinguished between those who were sick and those who were afflicted with unclean spirits (v. 16)? He knows the difference. There is a spiritual harm that comes to us through Satan and his forces. That too will one day be completely healed.

### **III. The Path to Healing**

It is the residents of the kingdom of God who experience this healing. Anyone, regardless of social class, gender, age or anything else, can become a resident of God’s healing kingdom. Luke tells us how in verse 14. He says that **“believers were added to the Lord.”** What a striking way to put it! Christians are those what have been added to the Lord. There is a heavenly roster that contains a list of all those of whom the Lord says, “They are mine.” And those who belong to him receive the healing. How does one come to belong to him? Luke says that *believers* were added.

He also tells us something about what it means to be a believer. Verse 13 says that there were two rather contradictory responses to what the Lord was doing here. There were some who wanted to stay away from God’s people—**“None of the rest dared join them.”** There were others who were drawn to them—**“but the**

**people held them in high esteem.”** These responses, fear and attraction, are due to the way God is revealed in this chapter. Luke has just finished the account of Ananias and Sapphira, who were judged immediately by God upon their hypocrisy. The power of God in judgment was thus revealed. Then in this passage describing Peter’s healing ministry we see the power of God to bring healing. Genuine faith always has this tension in it. God’s judgment is more severe and troubling than we know, and his grace is much greater than we know.

Think about it this way. The way to grasp more fully the healing God’s grace brings to our lives isn’t to deny the judgment of God, but to affirm it. I’m afraid that the common path today to know the love of God is to view a God of judgment as an Old Testament kind of thing that we have moved beyond. Many people read passages of God’s judgment and think, “God isn’t like that any more.” But it’s not true. God is still like that. He was in the passage just prior to this. If you want to grow in your grasp of God’s grace and love toward you, you must also grow in your grasp of the greatness of his judgment.

**Illustration:** I was talking with a pastor this week about church discipline. He said that after his church had excommunicated someone for unrepentant sin, they had followed their normal pattern of putting a notice in the bulletin to inform the congregation of that fact. The reason churches give public notice of the censure of excommunication is that it is the response of the church to public sin. If the sin is public, then the censure should be as well. But the church secretary wasn’t paying attention to the order of announcements in the bulletin that week. The announcement said, “The Session took action this week to excommunicate a church member for the lack of repentance for the sin of adultery.” The very next announcement said, “If you would like to become a member of our church, plan on attending the new membership class that starts next week.” He told me that they had more people in that membership class than before or since then.

Isaiah describes God’s people as those **“who tremble at his word”** (66:5). Peter describes the unrighteous as those **“who do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones”** (2 Pet. 2:10). To believe in Jesus is to tremble before the God who judges. But it is also to have your breath taken away at the expanse of his grace. The grace of God comes to us only because Jesus was judged in our place. As the old hymn says, “In my place condemned he stood.”

## **CONCLUSION:**

This healing grace of God can come to you in a moment. Luke says that believers were added to the Lord. There were those who woke up as sinners who would be condemned, but who went to bed that night as forgiven sinners who would experience the full healing of God. The difference comes from believing.