

SERMON SUBJECT: THE GIFT OF HEALING

SCRIPTURE: Luke 7:19-23

And John, calling two of his disciples, sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come, or look we for another? When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee saying, Art thou he who should come, or look we for another? And in the same hour he cured many of infirmities, and plagues, and of evil spirits, and unto many blind he gave sight. Then Jesus, answering, said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed are they who shall not be offended in me.

The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. -- James 5:15.

Jesus expressed his concern about the physical, as well as the spiritual welfare of man, in the very opening act of his ministry, when he read from the book of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue at Capernaum, and announced that he had been sent to recover sight to the blind, and to set at liberty them who are bruised. Through the short years of his ministry, he continued to manifest a concern for the physical, as well as for the spiritual. When multitudes followed him into a desert place without remembering to bring food, he fed them with the loaves and fishes. When the disciples became wearied by thronging crowds and pressing duties Jesus recognized the need for physical rest, and withdrew with them into a solitary place. Of Jesus' thirty-three recorded miracles, twenty-four were for the cure or healing of specific individuals. And there are several other scripture passages which indicate that whole groups, or even multitudes came to him for healing, though individuals are not singled out for the record. Percy Dearmer, in his book "Body and Soul" lists forty-one occasions on which Jesus exercised his powers of healing.

When Jesus chose and commissioned his twelve apostles, this concern continued. "He sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick." (Luke 9:2) "He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease," (Matt. 10:1) and commanded them, "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils; freely ye have received, freely give." (vs.8) The seventies were sent out with the same commission, to heal the sick, and declare the kingdom of God, (Luke 10:9) and returned to him later to report that his promise of power had been fulfilled in their ministry. His closing commission to his ministry included a promise of signs following the believer, one of which was that they should lay hands on the sick, and they should recover. The ministry of healing was intended to continue in the church, so long as there were those who believed in Jesus, and had faith to claim the signs following.

The philosophy of the Old Testament Jews regarded all physical illness as a judgment from God -- something to be borne with patience as a just retribution and punishment for one's sins. Those who came to comfort Job in his sickness, you will remember, had little sympathy for his suffering, but insisted that he disclose and confess the sins which had brought this suffering upon him. Among the Jews, physicians were usually classed with magicians, astrologers, and witches. God was the great Healer; and any disease which he did not heal was to be borne patiently as his punishment, the mark of his anger and disfavor. The physician, as we know him today, was unknown to the Old Testament Jews, but was a product of a later era and of Grecian learning and culture.

In complete and radical contrast to this philosophy was Jesus' attitude towards illness and disease. He did not regard physical disability or sickness as the visitation of God, nor even necessarily the will of God, but as the work of Satan. He characterized the woman who had suffered an infirmity for eighteen years as "bound by Satan," not by God. In the case of the man blind from birth, Jesus was completely unorthodox but emphatic in declaring that neither the blind man nor his parents had sinned to bring that affliction as a punishment upon him.

Individual sin may of course bring individual affliction. But in many, or perhaps in most instances, sickness, accidental injury, disease, and death are the result of collective sin -- the sin of the race, in which we all bear some degree of responsibility but not full individual responsibility. As Jesus' atonement through suffering on the cross was for the spiritual salvation of man, it was also for his physical salvation -- for his release from Satan's bondage of pain, sickness, disease, physical infirmity, and death. The atonement of Christ brings to pass the resurrection of man's physical body -- the redemption of that body from the captivity of sin to the freedom of health and perfection. Jesus intended that his atonement should be efficacious for the whole man -- both body and spirit.

Why should the church of Christ be concerned with healing? First, because, as we have seen, Christ set the example by setting gifts of healing in the church, and commanding his ministry to heal the sick. Second, because a ministry of mental and spiritual healing is needed to supplement and complement the treatments prescribed by men of medical science. All of the trend of modern medicine is to treat the patient not simply as a mechanism, but as a personality -- a body, plus a mind and a spirit, and to give treatment when necessary to all these three aspects of personality. It is foolish and unproductive to treat the body, while ignoring a sick spirit or mind; it is equally foolish to treat a sick spirit and ignore a sick body. There is such a close relationship between the two that it is impossible to separate them.

In reading various works on the subject of healing, I find that modern physicians estimate that all the way from fifty to ninety per cent of physical ills have either a mental, or an emotional, or a spiritual cause, rather than a purely physical. E. Stanley Jones quotes a Dr. Gordon as saying, "More people are sick because they are unhappy, than unhappy because they are sick." If anything is physical and not mental, it is a bone fracture, yet Dr. Flanders Dunbar, in a study of bone fracture cases at the Presbyterian Hospital in New York found that eighty-five per cent of those cases were marked by long established anxiety hysterias, and various phobias and resentments. (See page 108, "Is the Kingdom of God Realism," by E. Stanley Jones.)

There is no longer the slightest doubt in the minds of medical men that such things as guilt, fear, worry, hate, anger, resentment, and loneliness or lack of appreciation can produce definite physical symptoms and diseases in the human body. One of the valuable contributions of the church to the sum total of a healing ministry should be the elimination of these things from human life. Through its saving ordinances, administered in the name and power of Christ, the sick soul can find forgiveness for sin and release from the load of guilt. In its teachings and worship, the fearful and the worried may find faith and courage; the lonely and frustrated may find a sense of Christ's love and concern for them. In its ministry of reconciliation, those with hatreds learn how to forgive and to love their enemies.

Christ set in his church a definite ordinance for the healing of those who were sick. Mark 6:13 records that the twelve "cast out many devils, and annointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them." This ordinance is more completely described in the fifth chapter of James, verses 4 and 5: "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, annointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him."

Though this was the ordinance set in the church for healing, there were no prohibitions of other methods of healing. Jesus used the laying on of hands, but in some cases he healed those who were not even in his presence, who could not therefore have had his hands laid on them. In other situations, great multitudes came to him for healing, and it is not likely that all of them received the laying on of hands. Jesus healed some by simply touching them, without further formality; others were healed when they touched him or the hem of his garment. In other cases he used physical means, such as anointing with clay or spittle, or washing in a pool. He used physical, spiritual, and mental methods, often in combination. Certainly we should not hesitate to use all legitimate methods of healing in his name today. Which method should be used in any particular situation should be a matter of wisdom and expediency, but no matter which one is used, it is always proper to use also the prayer of faith and the laying on of hands.

In early New Testament times, Peter, Stephen, Annanias, and Paul healed the sick by the laying on of hands, and Paul travelled with Luke, the physician, sharing with him the honors which came from the many people who were healed on the island of Melita. (Act 28:10) It is not unreasonable to assume that since Paul never found relief from his "thorn in the flesh" through spiritual means, Luke the physician, did what he could as they travelled together to alleviate Paul's suffering and prolong his life and ministry.

For a number of reasons which we have not time to examine here, the gifts of healing soon disappeared from the New Testament church. When Christianity became the state religion under Constantine, the spiritual and moral fiber of the church deteriorated rapidly, and power to heal the sick died out. By 800 A.D., Bishop Theodulph of Orleans issued a pastoral manifesto ordering that the ordinance of anointing with oil and laying on hands was to be used only as a preparation for death; and in 1151 A.D. the rite of extreme unction was declared to be one of the sacraments of the church, to be given only to those in danger of death. In 529 A.D. the Emperor Justinian closed the medical school of Athens and Alexandria, and in 1215 A.D. Pope Innocent condemned surgery and all priests who practiced it. In 1248, dissection and the study of anatomy were prohibited by the church. The two streams of healing -- physical and spiritual -- first divided -- never to come together again until our day -- and then died out. Again the philosophy arose that pain and suffering are the punishment of God for sin -- that if you want to be saintly, you must suffer.

In the church restored under Joseph Smith's ministry in 1830, men with restored priesthood authority again began to lay hands on the sick, and they recovered -- not always, for sometimes in the wisdom of God it is not expedient that men should be healed, as it was not expedient for Paul to be healed. And sometimes the spiritual level of church is not what it should be; the corporate spiritual life is not rich enough or full enough to call forth a gift of healing. Faith must be exercised not only by the individual to be healed, but by the entire fellowship of the church, if gifts of healing are to be sought and received. We are also told that "it is appointed unto every man once to die," but "if they live they shall live unto me, and if they die they shall die unto me, and death shall be sweet unto them." In other words, surrender to and cooperation with the will of God is more to be desired sometimes than healing. It is better to find Jesus and not to be healed, than to be healed and never to know Jesus, but to continue in a life of rebellion and sin.

Latter Day Saints have always believed and taught that God is concerned with man's bodies, as well as with their spirits. In 1833 God gave to the church through his prophet a "word of wisdom" regarding diet, the use of stimulants, hot drinks, alcoholic liquors, and tobacco, which was far ahead of its time. In 1906, after the gathering of a considerable number of our people to Independence, the church was commanded by revelation to build a "sanitarium, a place of refuge and help for the sick and afflicted," where the members of the church "may be removed from the influences and environments unfavorable to the exercise of proper faith unto the

www.LatterDayTruth.org

healing of the sick." One of the apostles of the church, Joseph Luff, who was also a trained physician, was named to be the first head of this institution, and to be physician to the church. This followed a precedent established in 1830, when Thomas B. Marsh, a physician, was called to be an apostle and also a physician to the church only five months after the church was first organized.

The original Sanitarium building has long since been outgrown and remodelled into a Nurses' Home, but in a larger, more modern building the Independence Sanitarium and Hospital still continues to operate under the sponsorship of the church, with emphasis still placed on the spiritual aspects of healing as well as on the physical. The church provides a full time chaplain to cooperate with the physicians in bringing a spiritual ministry to patients and student nurses. The prayer of faith is still heard in its wards and rooms, both before and after medical treatment, and many times that prayer of faith coupled with the laying on of hands has saved the sick after the scientific skill and physical resources of men have been used to the uttermost. In this institution many different gifts of healing are exercised by physicians, surgeons, nurses, technicians, pharmacists, dietitians, and ministers, working together with each other and with God as a team to bring healing to the sick and afflicted of the church and of the community which the church serves.