

Part 3 - The Passions of Divine Healing

The first question we tend to ask when hearing of a miraculous healing is, “How did you pray?” We want to reduce healing to a formula. The standard content of these formulae are: praying in Jesus name, applying the Blood (whatever that means!), commanding sickness to leave, rebuking Satan, confessing healing, declaring God’s promises, claiming the atonement and such like. We should be very wary of this tendency which treats healing as the result of manipulating supernatural powers by our words. This is in fact magic or sorcery and the scripture warns us very sternly to avoid such things. Healing does not come through our words, but through our passions.

Love is the primary passion of healing – love for God and love for others.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus was moved with compassion in His healing ministry:

“Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man” (**Mk 1:41**).

“Jesus was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick” (**Mt 14:14**).

The most famous example of this is when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead where it is recorded, “Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”” (**Jn 11:35-36**)

Many prominent healing ministers testify that love was the key to releasing healing in their ministry. This is not something we can switch on, but we should let a person’s situation move us to compassion when we pray.

Anger against the Devil’s works is another passion of healing. Peter warns that “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (**1Pe 5: 8**). He does this through the mechanisms of the fall – natural disasters, sickness, conflict etc., he does it through attacking the faith of believers and through bringing temptation. He does these things at global, national and individual levels seeking to bring chaos and destruction wherever he can.

Jesus was angry at the destructive work of the devil in people’s lives. Twice in healing Lazarus, John records Jesus anger in the words translated “deeply moved” or “groaned in the spirit” which literally mean “snorted like a horse stirred for battle”. Jesus was moved by compassion for those He loved and anger against the devil He hated.

The devil has persuaded the church that sickness is still in the Satan’s power and that the gospel is powerless against it. We need to be filled with the wrath of God against the usurping devil who seeks to regain his grip of evil through deceitfully undermining the victory of Christ. However, we should not direct our words or attention towards the devil, but remain focussed on God the healer.

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (**Eph 6:10-12**)

“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (**Jas 4:7**)

The Glory of God is another passion of healing. In a world that mocks the church as inept and denies God as sovereign, our passion for God’s glory should propel us in healing the sick.

“Yes, LORD, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts” (**Isa 26:8**).

Changed lives and sickness healed are two wonderful ways in which God is glorified on earth. When Jesus went to raise Lazarus from the dead He said, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” (**Jn 11:40**).

Faith in God’s promises is yet another passion of healing. God’s appeal all through scripture is for a people who will believe and trust in Him. If we consider ourselves to be a child of God then we should be passionate about believing what He says. Jesus said “Have faith in God. I tell you the

truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” (Mk 11:22-24). It simply will not do to give up on promises we have yet to inherit. If God has said it, it has to be true.

A life worth living is something to be passionate about. We have been called to do the works God has prepared for us, so that when we meet Him on judgement day we will hear Him say, “Well done good and faithful servant”. We are called to be ambassadors for God in this dark world, proclaiming and demonstrating the presence and Lordship of Christ wherever we are, whatever we do. Healing is a vital part of this ministry.

Jesus wants us to be fruitful.

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.” (Jn 15:7-16 NKJV)

There is so much encouragement here. As we abide in Christ and seek to do what He has commanded us (including healing the sick) He assures us of answered prayer, His love, His joy, His friendship and fruitfulness. This sounds like a life worth living. We can be assured that “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Lk 12:32).

Case Study of Jesus raising Lazarus

John 11 gives us the most detailed account of any healing that Jesus performed and provides valuable insight and guidelines into receiving answers to prayer. In this account, Jesus’ passions are evident.

Now a man named Lazarus was sick ...<http://biblehub.com/john/11-3.htm> so the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.” When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” (Jn 11:1-4)

Imagine Mary and Martha’s relief when they received Jesus’ reply, “This sickness will not end in death.” They knew that Jesus could heal without being present – He had done that before. All they needed to do was to nurse Lazarus while he recovered, or until Jesus arrived and healed him.

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.” (Jn 11:5-7)

Jesus was motivated in this healing by two loves; the love of God’s glory and love for this family. These should always be our motivations in prayer and ministry. But Jesus’ love for the family did not cause Him to drop everything and rush to their aid. Instead He listened for the Father’s instructions and obeyed Him by delaying two days. Sometimes God’s perfectly loving will is a mystery to us; sometimes it goes against our reason.

I befriended a family that was living in a desperate and unsafe hovel. A neighbour had built them a new home but had lost his job and could not put the roof on it. I had the money to help, and James says that I should give it (James 2:14-17), but the Spirit said I should not. For three years I kept visiting and still the new house stood empty without a roof. Then the neighbour got another job and roofed the house and the family moved in. God was answering the neighbour’s prayer and did not want me interfering.

There may be reasons for delay that we will never understand this side of heaven, but we must never doubt God's love and His immediate engagement with the answer to our prayer.

"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light." (Jn 11:8-10)

The disciples responded to the situation with fear. Their eyes were fixed on what they could see – the hostility of the Jews. We can be held back by fear – fear because of what we know or don't know about a situation, fear of what people might think or do, fear of what might *not* happen, fear of our incompetence, fear of disappointment.

But Jesus' response is "whose Kingdom do you belong to? Are you walking in light or darkness? If you walk in the light you have nothing to fear. Fear belongs to those who walk in darkness."

We must remind ourselves that we walk in the light and have nothing to fear.

After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." (Jn 11:11-14)

Jesus tells the disciples what He sees: Lazarus is asleep and He goes to wake him. Jesus chooses not to give the problem any glory. He does not deny there is a problem – when pressed He says "Lazarus is dead" – but He dwells on the glorious outcome and belittles the problem. What a contrast to our response to problems. We usually examine all the details in depth and then proceed to tell anyone who will listen. When we pray we tell God all the gory details. We want to make sure everyone knows just how desperate the situation is.

We should learn from Jesus to focus on the God glorifying outcome and not dwell on the seriousness of the problem. To God, a huge miracle is no more difficult than a tiny miracle. When I pray for healing from cancer, I think of the problem as no more difficult than healing a cold. To God they are equally insignificant.

Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (Jn 11:16)

Doubting Thomas is not the kind of disciple you want to take with you on ministry. This kind of "humorous" irony may get a laugh, but it undermines faith. Humour can be used to great effect, as Jesus often does, but it can also be a cover for damaging unbelief. When facing challenging situations we need to guard our hearts and confess truth with our mouths.

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home." (Jn 11:17-20)

Jesus does not immediately go to Bethany, but stops outside the village (v30). It seems He does not want to get immersed in the grief that has filled the village. We often see Jesus taking people away from the crowds or grief-filled relatives when bringing healing. Unbelief is a serious hindrance to answered prayer, and unbelief can be contagious! It is better to minister with one faith-filled brother than a whole crowd of wailers. God does not answer wailing and begging, but faith.

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask. Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." (Jn 11:21-24)

Martha, the practical one, comes out to Jesus – and comes straight out with her accusation: "if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Martha is clearly blaming Jesus for what has happened. She sees herself as the arbiter of truth and justice. If things do not work out as she had hoped and expected, then the world and God is at fault. She does not come in humility and faith, saying "Lord, I don't

understand. What is God doing in this situation?" But she gives Jesus a second chance: "even now God will give you whatever you ask". Martha is saying, "Jesus, you messed it up. But it's not too late for you to perform remedial action."

Although Martha's reaction is understandable from a human perspective, it is really quite shockingly arrogant as a response to God! Nevertheless, Jesus is not at all offended and answers her graciously, "Your brother will rise again." God does not give up on us when we respond in unbelief. He graciously reminds us of His promises and gives us another chance to believe.

Martha responds "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." This is the response of a disappointed heart. Jesus has now said to her: "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory" and "Your brother will rise again." But instead of believing Lazarus will be raised and risking further disappointment Martha interprets Jesus' promise as referring to judgement day. Disappointment is the killer-disease for Christians. We collect our disappointments and present them to God as reasons not to believe. We find all kinds of ways of excusing God from His promises. Have you noticed that Jesus does not qualify His promises? "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." (Jn 14:14). Imagine if Jesus had said, "You may ask me for anything *according to God's will*, and I will do it." or "You may ask me for anything *that glorifies God*, and I will do it." Well, we would then have a whole repertoire of reasons not to believe. "I don't know if this is God's will... I don't know if this really will glorify God..." Qualified promises are promises we can avoid, and so avoid possible disappointment. God is far less concerned that we might ask for the wrong thing than he is that we might not ask at all.

It would have pleased Jesus if Martha had responded "Jesus! That is wonderful. I knew you would not fail us! Forgive us for our doubt and grief..." If we want to please God, we should not excuse Him from His promises but praise Him for them and believe them.

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." (Jn 11:25-27)

Jesus is again very gracious to Martha. She is struggling with her faith for Lazarus, so Jesus gets her to refocus on who He is. He leads her from a place of unbelieving disappointment to an amazing vision of who Jesus is. This is the best remedy for struggling faith. Look again at Jesus. See who He is. It is seeing Him that restores our courage and faith to risk believing again.

Martha returns and calls Mary to come and see Jesus:

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (Jn 11:32)

Mary says exactly the same as Martha had said. They had no doubt been saying this to each other for the four days since Lazarus died. They must have been so shocked and dismayed at his death, not only because of their love for their brother, but even more so because Jesus had sent word to say Lazarus would not die (except that is not what Jesus said. He said "This sickness will not *end* in death" which of course was true).

So Mary and Martha found themselves in a seemingly impossible situation regarding their faith. They believed in Jesus, they believed He loved them and they had received a wonderfully reassuring promise from Him. Yet that promise had failed and Jesus had let them down without any good reason.

Why had he delayed when he said that he loved them? He had healed others with a word from a distance, why not Lazarus? Nothing made sense; nothing Jesus had said enabled them to understand the situation. All that was left in their hearts was a sense that Jesus had let them down; that Jesus was to blame. Had he been there earlier he could have done something and he failed them.

How often has some accident occurred and we have said "God, why did that have to happen. It would have been so easy for you to have averted this accident." A close Christian friend of mine who had only recently married stepped off the pavement and was killed by a passing car. It seemed so pointless and so avoidable. "If you had been there it wouldn't have happened..." Other friends watched in helpless horror as their two young children died, trapped in a burning vehicle. Of course we grieve and we cannot understand, but one

thing we cannot say is “If you had been there it wouldn’t have happened...” God is always there, but so is evil and unbelief and disobedience and fallen nature and mysteries known only to God. In the end, we have to put our trust in God’s goodness.

Of course we have huge sympathy for Mary and Martha’s despair, but nevertheless they were wrong. Jesus had given them a promise and they should have believed Him rather than the evidence of their eyes. This world is passing away, but God’s word endures forever. His promises are more certain than the physical world we inhabit. They should have sent the mourners away and held a worship service thanking God for His faithfulness and that He loved them so much that Jesus had told them that Lazarus’ sickness would not end in death but in God’s glory.

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. (Jn 11:33-38)

We are told twice that Jesus was “deeply moved” by the weeping mourners, also that He was “troubled” and He wept. He was clearly *not* troubled by Lazarus’ death, as the Jews supposed, since He had come to raise him to life. Perhaps He was moved by the pain in the hearts of those He loved, but why “troubled”? My guess is that Jesus was moved and troubled by the devastating and unnecessary hopelessness resulting from unbelief. It is deeply depressing and troubling if, when you have done so much to nurture faith in believers, you are faced with a wall of unbelief, wailing and pleading and crying out to God, “Why have you let this happen...”

Jesus had come full of faith and looking forward to seeing God’s glory, but first He had to wade through this quagmire of despair. He went directly to the tomb.

“Take away the stone,” he said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there four days.” Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” (Jn 11:39-40)

Martha is still in unbelief concerning Lazarus. She thinks Jesus just wants to see the body and say His farewell, but advises against it on account of the stench. Jesus urges her to faith once more, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

That is a promise we would all do well to memorise and take to heart. We prefer to say, “If I see the glory of God, then I will believe...” Indeed, Jesus performed His works as signs of the kingdom, and said “If you do not believe My words then believe because of My works” (e.g. John 10:38, 14:11). But who is going to perform those works now that Jesus has gone to the Father? Jesus said, “Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” It is up to us now. To us Jesus says, “if you believe, you will see the glory of God”. This does not mean simply believing in who Jesus is – Martha has already shown that she have amazing insight and faith regarding who Jesus is. When Jesus says “if you believe...” He is talking about believing the specific promises He has given, which for Mary and Martha was that Lazarus would live and God would be glorified. Faith precedes seeing.

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me. When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” (Jn 11:41-43)

Jesus came to the moment where, as they say, the rubber hits the road. Up to this point it has all been in His imagination. For days He has carried this vision of God being greatly glorified in raising Lazarus from the stench of death. He has encouraged His disciples with this vision and shared it with Mary and Martha. He has carried it in His heart and brought it in prayer to the Father. But it cannot remain a vision any longer. Jesus has publically proclaimed His confidence in what God would do and it can be delayed no longer. It is time to deliver... What Jesus does is very instructive for us.

First He addresses the Father, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me." Jesus turns His attention first to His own faith. He reminds Himself of God's promise to always hear and answer His prayer. Jesus has given us the same promises:

"Ask, and it shall be given you; (Matt 7:7)

"I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:20)

"Truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. (Matthew 18:19)

"I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done." (Matthew 21:21)

"If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." (Matthew 21:22)

"Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24)

"And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." (John 14:13-14)

"Truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete." (John 16:23-24)

How many more promises that God hears and answers do we need? At the point where we put our faith on the line it is very good for us to remind ourselves of these promises, just as Jesus did as He stood in front of Lazarus' stinking dead body.

But note that Jesus did not *ask* God to hear and answer, but gave *thanks* that the Father always hears Him. The prayer of faith is not a plea to God, but a confident declaration of our trust in what God has already promised.

It is also instructive that Jesus thanked God "for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe". Even when we are already confident in God hearing and answering us, it is still good to say this out loud for the encouragement of those with us. We are following Jesus' example when we quote God's promises and give thanks for them in our prayer to encourage each other's faith.

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

The "prayer" itself was hardly a prayer! It was not addressed to God, did not include the "magic" words "In Jesus Name" and did not end with "Amen". It was not even a request, it was a command. Jesus does not speak to God, nor does He speak to the problem; He speaks to the result! Jesus does not speak to death, commanding it to loose its hold; He addresses the dead man and tells him to do what only a living man can do. Jesus speaks to the answer to His prayer. He does not concern Himself with the problem at all. That is the Father's business. The Father does not need Jesus' help or advice. When facing great challenges, Jesus shows us that we should fix our attention on the outcome, not the problems. God deals with the problems; He wants us to fill our hearts and our attention with His glorious solution.

After the preparatory faith-building thanksgiving it is hard to imagine a briefer prayer; three words. Jesus warned us against praying like the heathen:

"When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words." (Matt 6:7)

We should use as many words as necessary to build up our faith and prepare us and our hearers for the situation we are addressing, but the prayer itself should be brief. No pleading, no advising God, no justifying our requests, no telling God how deserving the situation is of His favour. Indeed, a prayer of faith may not need any words at all! Many words indicates little faith.

The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." (Jn 11:44)

The conclusion of this incredible miracle was for Lazarus to be set free. "Let him go." Jesus always let those whom He healed go their own way. Even though, in this case, Lazarus was a disciple (though not one of the twelve), He did not demand those who were healed become disciples. Healing is not in exchange for discipleship. Healing is to set people free from sickness and pain because God loves them. Of course God wants all to respond to His love by turning to Him, but He does not demand it. Those who are healed but do not turn to Jesus will face a more severe judgement (see Matt 11:20-24).

Jesus' "prayer" of faith is also followed by a demonstration of its outcome: "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." Wherever possible, we should invite a person we have prayed for to tell us if the prayer has already been answered, and where appropriate, ask if they can do something they could not previously do. We should avoid faking healing, or claiming more than is evident, but look for genuine evidence of God's answer.