

# Healing and the Incarnation

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The ministry of healing means that we take the Incarnation seriously. The Incarnation means that God is here. Not only is God with us, but God has become a human being. Jesus is God, as it were, coming down; it is not a humanitarian reach for heaven. A humanitarian understanding leaves you with a psychological approach to healing. Your ministry will be a diagnostician's approach; you will be problem and symptom centered. The Incarnation is not about our reaching up, but it's about God reaching down and becoming a human being.

This is what I understand about healing! We are not ministering salve to sores; we are ministering love to suffering people. It is Jesus Christ living within us, who has perfected our humanity, who is ministering to suffering people. He is not simply a spiritual being, but he has become flesh. He is now both spirit and body: this is the Incarnation. Jesus does not reveal a compartmentalized life. Rather, he reveals the marriage of opposites, with spirit and matter becoming one. God becoming one with us—heaven and earth becoming one. Heaven coming to earth, and earth being caught up into heaven. In this way we have the supernatural made manifest through the natural, and the natural lifted up to the level of the supernatural. That's what we are talking about when we talk about healing.

This means that all methods are ours. For instance, we use natural methods: we build hospitals, we train doctors, and we train nurses—all in God's image. Yet we believe in the supernatural. So we pray and utilize the sacraments. It is not either/or; it is both/and. All things are ours, for God has married all these elements in Jesus. As one of the early church fathers put it, "Jesus became what we were so that we might become what he is."

Our Father now shares with us what he has achieved in Jesus Christ, and this achievement includes the redeeming of humanity—a new kind of humanity. Jesus comes into the all of us, becomes mind of our mind, becomes spirit of our spirit, becomes bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. God's purpose is to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ; God intends for us to be like Jesus—not in the abstract, but in the concrete here and now. He accomplishes this by the power of his Spirit working within us. This is what we are talking about when we are talking about healing: we are talking about being conformed to the image of Jesus. That's wonderful, isn't it? Jesus ministers to us from the realm of the resurrection, and shares with us his own achievements. There are limitless ways in which he accomplishes this.

Nevertheless, there are some specific issues involved. For example, Jesus Christ reveals himself, sharing our humanity, for our instruction, in several basic ways. Most important of all, he accepts himself in terms of his union with the Father. He never tries to minister what he has not worked out within himself. He does not heal in order to prove that he is the Christ; he heals because he is the Christ. His healing power comes from his very

being. That reverses the usual order; in the natural order we are judged by what we do: this man is a priest, this one an attorney, and this one a banker. But in the kingdom of the Father our doing comes out of our being. Jesus Christ manifests himself from within.

For instance, here comes the man with the withered arm. Jesus Christ does not begin by diagnosing the cause of the man's problem, but he goes within himself to his Father. Through his union with the Father he sees the creative power of God; he sees this man as whole before God. And from that inner level of union with the Father he speaks, "Stretch forth thy hand."

The same thing with St. Peter. His name is Simon, which means "a reed"—a reed blown about by every wind. At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do men say that I am?"

"Some say you are Elijah, some say you are John the Baptist, some say you are another great prophet." Then Jesus looks at his disciples and says, "Who do you say that I am?" And Simon says, "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God."

Jesus says (I'm going to paraphrase at this point), "You did not discover this by natural means, but you have been before my Father, and my Father revealed to you who I am. Now, Simon Peter, I've been before the Father about you. So while those around you call you a reed, I see you before the Father's throne, and I see a rock. You're not a reed, you're a rock."

Who told Jesus that? How did he know it? It was a revelation that came from his union with his Father; in that union he saw Peter as the rock on which the church was to be built. That is the way the healing ministry of Jesus works—yesterday, today, and forever; he sees people before the Father. He manifests outwardly what he sees by the Spirit. That is glorious! You really glimpse the glory of God when you see the heart of Jesus. He looks at people and he sees them not as trees, not as goats, but he sees them as sheep without a shepherd. That is glorious, isn't it? Before the Father, people are sheep; that is healing.

How do you see people? How do you see people in your heart? That is the very key to your healing ministry. How do you see yourself before the Father? Do you let Jesus Christ establish in your heart who you are in the light of his love? This is what the Holy Spirit does. He shows us who we are separated from God, and then he shows us who we are in relationship to God. Then we simply make that exchange; that is what confession is all about. We come to confession because of a conviction of our sin. When a priest hears our confession, we are saying, "Apart from God, this is what I am. I neglect my husband; I get mad at my children; I ignore my church. Apart from God I am all these things and more." When a priest hears our confession he says, "You are right: and the truth is you are a lot worse. But where sin did abound, grace does much more abound. And so, here is who you are before God. And here is how you go about appropriating that grace." These ways of appropriating grace are simply a bridge to where people ought to be in Jesus. That is healing.

One basic element of healing is helping persons to accept themselves in relationship to God even while they still have the sickness. Now, this is basic, and yet so often we don't do it. We give people the impression that they are sick because of their meanness: "If you do not get right you are going to get sicker. There is not much hope for you anyway; God makes you sick in order to make your spirit sweet." That is the impression we give. But that isn't the gospel; that isn't our ministry. That doesn't bring anyone into union with Jesus. The gospel

says that God loves us as we are—that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. When Christ was crucified there wasn't a single Christian—not a single Christian in the world.

By the grace that is in Jesus, we belong to God. By his healing power we belong to God. Don't you know that most sickness is rooted in the people's sense of not belonging? They are sheep without a shepherd. They don't know the shepherd; they don't know they belong. So we come in Jesus' stead and tell the precious people, "You belong to Jesus, and I've come to tell you this." That is the real power of our healing ministry. If we don't know this much about people, our ministry of healing will be greatly limited. Our healing ministry should come out of a conviction that we have been sent by God to lay his claims on people, and God's claim is, "You are mine!" Haven't you seen miracles happen through that kind of commitment, through people who know that they belong to Jesus?

In that story about Peter and John at the Gate Beautiful, Peter reached out and touched the man. He had perhaps been lying there nearly forty years—no salve, no bandaid, no penicillin. He was a stinking mess and, yet, Peter reached out and touched him. Are you afraid of touching people? Stay away from the healing ministry if you think you are too good to get involved with people's mess. Stay out of the healing ministry because you will have to minister with the compassion of God—you belong to God and you have come to tell people, "I've come to love you! I've come to transmit to you what I've experienced of the love of God."

So, we get people to accept themselves in relationship to God in the midst of the sickness, but we don't stop there. I think often the church has stopped there—that we have let people know they belong to God even if they are sick and we tell them that God can give them the grace to bear the sickness. So often we have left the impression that grace is the power to bear, the power to endure suffering. Now, grace is the power to endure, but, more than that, grace is the power to overcome. As we help people to accept themselves in relation to God, we also have a teaching ministry to let them know what their inheritance is in God. You see, very few people have difficulty believing God can heal, but, so often, people do not know he wants to heal them. This is where we are in the healing ministry: really helping people to know that their inheritance is health and healing. Jesus called it the "children's bread" (Matthew 15:26). That's a wonderful descriptive phrase for healing—the children's bread. Every child deserves bread from his father. No father makes a child pay for its own meals. "Thank you, Father. Thank you, Mother." "You're welcome," is their response.

This is true of our ministry to people—we are ministering to them their inheritance: "God loves you—God wants to heal you." This is not only true of healing for the body but also for the mind and spirit.