

Followers of the Way

By His stripes, and only by His stripes, we are healed

Steve Campbell, 30-10-22

Isaiah 53; Mark 2:1-12

Divine healing is a massive subject and we could easily spend a whole year discussing this topic without ever exhausting it. Yet we only have about 20 minutes to scratch the surface.

There are a variety of views on healing today. At one end of the spectrum you have those Christians, such as Brethren, who believe all miracles, including healing, ceased when the last of the apostles died. At the other end you have those like hyper charismatics who believe it is every Christian's absolute right to be healed. As usual, the truth is found somewhere in between those two extremes.

'By his stripes we are healed' comes of course from the fourth Servant Song in Isaiah 53, the most perfect prophetic picture of Christ on the cross. Writing 700 years before the event, the prophet Isaiah saw, with more clarity than those who witnessed the crucifixion, the meaning behind it all. This was indeed God's rescue plan revealed, foretold by the prophets and fulfilled in Christ. Our series is on the Gospel of Mark, yet we do not find this verse from Isaiah 53 quoted by the evangelist. What we must remember, however, is that Mark did not write of his own volition, but rather what Peter told him.

According to Early Church Father Papias, Mark 'was Peter's interpreter, [who] wrote down... how many things he remembered concerning the Lord's sayings and deeds' (Eusebius, Hist. Ecl. III,39,15). In other words, Mark reflects Peter's memories of the Lord Jesus and accords the Gospel apostolic authority. And Peter, Prince of the Apostles, certainly knew and used Isaiah 53 in his ministry. He alluded to this chapter in his sermons in Acts when he spoke about Jesus as the Suffering Servant, and he explicitly quotes Isaiah in his First Epistle, Ch.2 vv.22-24:

'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.'

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

Some have seen in Mark 10:45 a strong allusion to Isa 53, which says, 'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

The Gospel of Mark also focuses very much on the suffering of the Servant King. About one third is taken up with Jesus' last week on earth, including his agony in Gethsemane, betrayal, arrest, desertion, trial, scourging and crucifixion. And it's Mark who first recorded those words of dereliction: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mk 15:34).

There have been many portrayals of Christ's crucifixion through art and film, but we must never romanticize the cross. I wear a cross around my neck, as many do. Some think it's just a nice piece of jewellery, but no! It is a symbol of execution, similar to wearing a hangman's noose or guillotine around your neck! I wear it as a reminder of what Jesus did for me.

One of the most graphic portrayals of Jesus' suffering and death is in Mel Gibson's film, The Passion of the Christ. It is not an easy or comfortable watch, yet I believe it is necessary in order to comprehend something of the agony the Lord went through for us. The scourging of Jesus in the film is particularly realistic – you can almost feel the lacerations as the whip crosses his back and rips the skin, leaving those bleeding stripes. And it's by those stripes we are healed.

But what exactly does that mean? How are we healed?

Isaiah 53, like much of the Old Testament, is written in poetic form. Hebrew poetry follows the convention of parallelism, where the second line echoes and expands on the first. In the second half of v.5 it says, 'the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his (stripes) we are healed.' The 'stripes' correspond to the 'punishment' in the first line, and the word 'healed' is an echo of the 'peace' which he brought us. The Hebrew here is of course *shalom*, a much deeper, richer word than can be translated by our English word peace. It carries within it a sense of restoration, completeness, wholeness of body, mind and spirit.

The question has been asked: is Isaiah speaking of *spiritual* healing or *physical* healing? As we turn to the New Testament we can answer this question. Matthew 8:16-17 is the account of Jesus at Peter's house in Capernaum – 'When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all who were ill. This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: (quoting Ch.53:4) 'He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.' So this would indicate physical healing.

Then turning again to Peter in his first epistle Ch.2:24-25, it says, 'He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed.' For 'you were like sheep going astray,' but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.' This speaks more of spiritual healing, so we can conclude that both physical and spiritual healing are included in Isaiah's prophecy.

When Jesus healed, he didn't just remove a physical ailment or disability, he made the person whole in body, mind and spirit. This is illustrated in the story of the paralysed man in Mark 2:1-12. Having been carried by four friends on a mat and lowered from the roof, it was obvious to all what this man's greatest need was – healing of his paralysed

legs. Yet Jesus saw a deeper need in him that no-one else could, something that needed dealt with even before he could receive physical healing. He said to the man, 'Son, your sins are forgiven' (Mark 2:5).

It was thought in those days that sickness or disability was the result of sin. Remember the question the disciples asked Jesus in John 9:2 – 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus' answer exposed their flawed theology, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned ... but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.' (John 9:3)

So, by his stripes we are healed covers both physical and spiritual healing. But how do we answer those who believe it is every Christian's right to be healed? We can show they are mistaken first through theology and second by personal experience.

Wrong theology

Their theological stance on this matter comes under the heading of Realised Eschatology. This includes the belief that all the benefits of God's kingdom are available to us here and now, including full and perfect healing. That's why they almost demand God to heal and doubt a person's faith if they are not healed – a very dangerous and disturbing practice. That is enough to shipwreck someone's faith.

What they are missing is that although God's kingdom has come in a partial way, it is still to come in all its fullness. We are living in the last days, but those last days began when Jesus came on earth and will only be completed when he comes again. We live in the in-between times of his first and second coming. The Holy Spirit is given as a deposit, a guarantee that the fullness of the kingdom will come. The healings and miracles of Jesus and his apostles, and indeed those after them, are a taster of what is ahead.

When healing comes, we rejoice; but a body that is restored is still subject to death. Only when Jesus returns will every tear will be wiped away and 'there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things [will have] passed away.' (Rev 21:4)

Personal Experience

Adrian Plass famously said, God heals and God doesn't heal. This is illustrated by the stories of two well known Christians

Jennifer Rees Larcombe died on the 24th October 2022. She grew up in a strong Christian family and followed Christ from an early age. She overcame dyslexia and bullying at school to become a successful writer. However, in 1982 Jennifer suffered a serious attack of the viral brain disease encephalitis. After a dramatic near-death experience, she recovered sufficiently to find herself confined to a wheelchair and granted disabled status. As the years passed, she found no healing, but she developed a valuable ministry to the many who had sought, but not received, healing from God.

Eight years later, after a simple prayer by a complete stranger at a conference, she was healed, stepped out of her wheelchair and took it home in the back of a friend's car and has never used it since.

Joni Eareckson Tada was a beautiful, athletic 17 year old when a diving accident in 1967 left her a quadriplegic and confined to a wheelchair. She had many prayers said over her, but she was not healed. Yet through her writing and speaking ministry she has helped countless numbers of people, especially in the field of disability. Two people in similar circumstances, one healed the other not.

I want to end on a very personal note. My dear wife Irene-Maria lives with three major health issues. From the age of two she has suffered from a chest condition that makes her susceptible to cold. She's had more chest infections than she can remember and it's so bad she cannot even take a cold drink without experiencing pain. Since 15 she's also had chronic fatigue syndrome; she cannot walk long distances and finds it hard to walk up stairs. When doing housework or any task she has to take regular periods of rest. On top of this she also has a condition called costochondritis, inflammation of the sternum causing severe chest pain, almost like a heart attack. Yet despite these various health issues her desire is always to achieve much for God's kingdom.

Irene-Maria has been prayed for, had hands laid on her and been anointed with oil by many people. I pray daily for her, day and night, yet so far healing has not come. It's very disappointing! So what do we do? Give up hope? Lose faith? No! We look to God, trusting in him who in all things works for the good of those who love him, thanking him for his Son Jesus, by whose stripes we have been healed and will be made whole, and taking encouragement and comfort from the Lord's words to Paul, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' ([2 Cor 12:9](#))