

Does Jesus Still Heal Today?
Matthew 8:1–17
Saturday, July 23, 2023

Let us pray: Living God, may your word live in us, that we might find life in your word, in Christ. Amen.

About 20 years ago, while I was still in seminary in Atlanta, Jen and I went with some friends from school to see Benny Hinn. For those of you who don't know him, Benny Hinn is the silver-haired preacher on TV who wears a white suit and puts his hand on people's heads, knocking them to the ground and healing them of their various disabilities and illnesses. He was having a service in Atlanta that was free to the public, so we went because we had seen him on TV, and we wanted to see what really went on at these events, and honestly, when are we going to have the chance to do *this* again?

It started with singing for 30 or 45 minutes, then he came out and preached for a while. And then it was time for the healing. We were sitting in the upper level of this arena, so I could look down on the floor and see all the people moving towards the stage to be healed. *Some* of the people made it up onto the stage, in front of the cameras, where he laid his hands on them. They would throw down their walkers and run across the stage, waving their hands and screaming. This went on for a while. But that wasn't what I ended up focusing on. I ended up watching the people who *didn't* get up on the stage in front of the camera. The people who, coincidentally, didn't get healed.

I was watching one man in particular – a young man wearing a football jersey (so he was easy for me to follow), who had extreme difficulty walking. I don't know exactly what was wrong with him, but he had a walker, and it took him about 5-10 minutes to walk a distance equal to the

length of this sanctuary. There were people set up at stations on the floor, and you could go to them, and they would pray for you and heal you. So when this young man finally got to one of those stations, several of Benny Hinn's helpers laid their hands on him and prayed for him. But nothing was happening. They would pray for him and then step back to see if anything had changed, but nothing had. They tried this over and over again for about 20 minutes before they finally just gave up, and the man started his long walk back to his seat.

I remember watching this and thinking, "This could have been that man's last hope. He has probably been going to doctors for years, and then he saw Benny Hinn and thought, 'This is my chance. This man can heal me.' And now he might have just lost his last hope." And Benny Hinn does what he does in the name of Jesus, so how did that reflect back on Jesus? What did that young man leave there that night thinking about Jesus?

It's easy to look at something like that and write it off as a scam. That Benny Hinn and people like him are just using the name of Jesus to make money off the suffering of others. And that may very well be the case. But I also think it raises an important question for us: *Does* Jesus still heal today?

We hear these stories all throughout the gospels of Jesus healing people who cannot see or hear or speak or walk; healing people with leprosy, epilepsy, and other physical ailments. There are stories of Jesus casting out demons and bringing people who have died back to life. *Then*, Jesus gives his *followers* the ability to do that in his name. He sends out his disciples to proclaim his word, cast out demons, and heal people, and he says, "The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, do *greater* works than these," for, "by using my name, they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

And so they *do*. The disciples go out and *heal* people. After Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, the first thing that these first Christians do is heal a blind man at the temple. At one point in the book of Acts, it says that people used to bring the sick out into the streets so that Peter's *shadow* might pass over them and heal them when he walked by. And James in his letter exhorts the early church to pray for one another so that they may be healed, because "the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective," and, "the prayer of faith will save the sick." That is one of the first things that drew people to Jesus and to the early church – one of the first things they were *known* for – the ability to *heal*.

So did all of that just *stop*? Or does Jesus still heal people today?

Years ago, one of my best friends called me one day, totally distraught, because his mother had just come back from the doctor, where she had been diagnosed with cancer. He told me all about it, and then he asked me to pray for her. So we both prayed for her on the phone. I prayed for her again that night. I think he stayed up praying for her *all* night. The next day, Jen and I were out having dinner and I got a phone call from him. He told me that his mother had gone back to the doctor that day for more tests, and the doctors could not find one single spot of cancer in her body. He was saying, "It's a miracle. I prayed to Jesus to heal my mother, and he did!"

I can't *explain* that. Is there a chance that the doctor just made a mistake in her initial diagnosis? *Maybe*. But when you're looking at a scan, saying, "That is cancer," and then you're looking at another, and you don't see anything there, I don't know. His mom said the doctor was just as bewildered as she was. So there are moments like that that make me think, "Yeah, Jesus still heals people today."

But then there are *other* moments. Last year, we started praying for a dear friend of mine, a 37-year-old woman named Marissa. Marissa and her husband Mark had a four-year-old boy, and they had just found out that she was pregnant again with a girl. She went in for some routine bloodwork, and when it came back, the doctor said, “You have leukemia.” They treated her just enough to get the baby born safely in December, and then they started with the heavy treatment. We prayed for her here every week, as did their church in Phoenixville. They had special prayer services where they prayed just for her. They had a Facebook group, where people *all over the world* were praying for her. I prayed *every day* for her to be healed. But it was just too much, and she died in May. Where was *her* healing?

I believe that Jesus *does* still heal people today. You can call me crazy or naïve, but I genuinely, truly believe that. I have a list of people who need healing that I pray for every day. We do it here every week. Why would we *do* that if we didn’t really believe that it was *possible*? But I *also* believe that we need a greater understanding of what healing *is*; of what it *means* to pray for someone’s healing. I came to a new understanding of that 12 years ago, and I want to tell you what it looks like, and in order to *do* that, I get to tell you about Rex.

Rex Buchanan was one of the best people I have ever known in my life. Just a genuinely good, kind, caring, servant of a man. In 2005, when Jen and I moved to Nebraska, Rex and his wife Virg lived right across the street from us and were members of the church I pastored. I had just lost both of my grandfathers within eight months of each other. They played a *huge* role in my life, and I was *really* close to them, so those were tremendous losses for me. Rex was 70 years old, and he filled that void in my life. He taught me how to do things around the house, how to fix things, how to take care of my yard. He helped me renovate the nursery when Jen and I were

expecting our first child. I learned *so much* from him, and he became one of my best friends in the world.

About four years later, Rex was diagnosed with cancer. He fought it *so hard* for two years. We prayed for him every Sunday in worship, every Wednesday night at prayer group, and I prayed for him every day on my own. But after two years, Rex died. And I remember talking to God the next morning, just kind of saying, “God, what’s up with that? So many people prayed so hard for so long for him to be healed.” You know what I heard? *He is healed.* That still, small voice inside me. *He is healed.* “Not exactly what I *meant*, God. Maybe I should have been a little more specific. I meant we want him to be healed *here, with us, in this life.*” *He is healed.*

God *always* provides healing. Sometimes, the healing that we need is possible in this life. And sometimes, the healing that we need is with God. But whether it is *here* or *there*, it is still healing.

So what I learned to do when praying for someone’s healing is to pray, “Lord, give them the healing that they need. I *hope* that is here with us. But if that’s not possible, may they find the healing they need with you.” That way of looking at it helped me see this bigger picture of what healing is and what *life* is. We all hope for physical healing in this life. But this life is not all there is. And we are not just physical beings. So the healing we need isn’t always physical. We are also *spiritual* beings, so sometimes the healing we need is spiritual. Sometimes the healing that we need is mental or emotional. Sometimes the healing that we need is relational. God *always* provides healing, but that healing doesn’t always look like we *expect*. So we need to step back and try to see this bigger picture of what healing is and what life is.

We are called, as followers of Jesus Christ, to heal as he did. Now, I have never restored someone's sight. I have never raised the dead or caused someone to throw down their walker or get up out of their wheelchair and walk. I don't know if I *could*, because nothing is impossible with God, but to this point, to the best of my knowledge, I have never physically healed someone. But physical healing is not all there is. I could not stop my friend Marissa from dying. But you know what I *have* done? I have been there for her husband Mark *every single day* since she did, reaching out to him, texting him, calling him, eating with him, talking with him, walking with him through this so that he knows he is not alone. I have worked for *his* healing.

Our friend Marie Cantafio is dying. None of us can stop that, and she doesn't *want* us to. Because the healing that she *needs* and *wants* is with God. What we *can* do is be there with her, talking with her, laughing with her, crying with her, praying with her, surrounding her with cards and flowers and beauty and love. *That is healing.*

Sometimes doctors and nurses serve as Jesus' healing hands in our lives. God has given us minds to develop medicine and treatments that can provide the healing we need. I had Lasik surgery seven years ago, where I was pretty much blind, and now I see. Knee and hip replacements that let people walk again. Cancer treatments and vaccines. Therapists who provide mental and emotional healing. Those things are gifts from God, and who are we to say that is not a part of God's healing presence in the world today?

We are called as followers of Christ to bring healing to the world around us. What *kind* of healing do the people around us need? And how can you help bring it about? How can *we*, as a *church*, work for the healing of the world? It might not just be healing *bodies*. It might also be healing *minds* and *spirits* and *hearts* and *relationships*. Jesus *does* still heal today. It just might

not always look like we expect. So let's expand our expectations, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.