

I want to talk today about a subject that I think we in the church need to be deeply concerned about, and that is the subject of healing. Margaret Mead, a noted anthropologist, once claimed that the earliest sign of civilization was a healed femur, because it was obvious that someone else had had to care for him. This she thought, was the beginning of society. Here was evidence that people began to care for each other, began to be concerned with healing each other. This should also be an evidence of the caring family of the church, where we soothe each other's wounds and do what we can to heal them.

I am not necessarily talking about physical healing. God talks in Ps 147.3 about 'healing the brokenhearted'. One of the functions of the church should be to heal the wounded. So many people are hurting for some reason or the other. I have seen the church comfort those, but I have also seen church members be the cause of that hurt. This latter part ought not be so!

One preacher thought he was doing someone a great favor by preaching a blasting sermon against the use of alcohol when a known alcoholic was in the audience. But he never saw the man again. He later on realized the tremendous error that he had committed. Here was a man wanting to try to do God's will, but instead of being comforted and healed, he was dumped on with a load of guilt and self-righteousness. Sure, the truth had been preached, there was no doubt about it. But it was not done in a way that helped. This preacher, Cecil Hook, likened his effort to seeing a man drowning and hollering at him, 'You're drowning You are going to die if you don't get out of that water!', yet without lifting a hand to actually help, to get into the situation with him and pull him out. Are we just interested in the 'truth' or are we interested in saving and healing souls? This is what I want us to think about as we continue in this lesson this morning.

We are so afraid of someone who is a 'sinner'! We have got to realize that we are all sinners! None of us can judge another! We don't want to associate with someone who commits a certain group of sins, we toss them off, or cast them adrift so that they slowly die in isolation. Do we not care for their souls, for their hurt? Jonah was perhaps the most extreme case that was recorded in the scriptures. Jonah, after he was virtually forced to preach the gospel to the Assyrians, hated the idea that they might be saved so much that he sat outside the city in the dim hope that God might destroy them anyway. He did not care about them at all; he only cared about himself. We must be concerned about people and their problems; this is to be the sign of the church, our love and concern.

First of all, we must realize that God is the ultimate source of all healing. The need for healing came into existence because man sinned, and death and sickness entered the world because of that sin. God cursed the ground, the universe in fact. But in establishing his people, his nation, he claimed in Exodus 15.26 that he would be the healer of the nation, and that none of the diseases of the Egyptians would be put upon them. We also remember that the symbol of healing that doctors use comes from the incident with the poisonous snakes and the people of Israel. Moses formed a brass serpent, and those who looked upon it were healed by God. There is this connection of turning to God, however, to this power of healing. In 2 Chr 7.14 and Ps 103.3, the ideas of repentance forgiveness healing are intimately connected. And in one miracle of Jesus, we see that he directly showed their connection (Mk 2. 1-12).

We mentioned earlier the nation that God established; this was to be an instrument of God's healing. God wanted a people, a family, a unity, a body. The message is clearer about the NT church being a body, but the parallel exists in the Old Testament. We must remember that healing is a natural function of the body. Whenever some part of the body is injured, we know that the entire body moves in reflex to that pain; white blood cells are rushed to the point of a cut; the heart begins to beat faster to supply energy that might be needed. Let us look at some interesting passages in the book of Jeremiah.

I am reading from Jeremiah 8 vss 11,15,18,21 and 22... Let us remember that God established the nation of Israel, promising as we read to heal them, but they turned from him and refused to listen to him. God attempted again and again to draw them to him, but the people refused. In these verses, the great suffering and sickness of the nation is described. But the climax is verse 22: The gist is that the nation had the healing power; there was healing balm in Gilead, but it was not used. And at another point, in Jer 46.11, we read that there is indeed balm in Gilead, but now it is too late for it to do any good. In Jeremiah 30.12 and verse 17 this wound

is described as incurable, with no healing no possible. In Lamentations 2.13, also written by Jeremiah, the wound is 'as deep as the sea'. Though there seems to be no hope, not within the nation itself, at least, in Jeremiah 33.6 we read that God will indeed heal. This will be according to his own good will, through the remnant that will return once the now existing nation has succumbed to the illness that has it laid low.

Let us read a similar theme found in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 34 vss 1-16... There are two very essential points that we must think about in addition to the obvious one of the healing mentioned here. First, this passage is talking about the lack of leadership, a problem with the shepherds. But I see that this applies to all of us; we all have the power of taking care of others, of applying healing comforts to them when they are in need. Then we see that those who don't do this are guilty of thinking only of themselves, making sure that they are taking care of themselves. Much like Jonah, they don't care about the saving of souls; only in the fulfillment of their own goals and desires.

But we finally get to the most important point of all in this passage: that when all is said and done, God is the one and the only one who can heal. Even though the nation has the responsibility for caring and healing and does not do the job, God will take care of his sickly lambs. This is a great comfort to us all, knowing that he will always care and look after us, even though we won't look after ourselves.

Throughout this era of the dying nation, God did point to another healing focal point; this time it was to be a healing Messiah. In Isaiah 53.5, and quoted in 1 Pet 2.24, we read that by his stripes we are healed. And in the last Old Testament Book, Malachi 4.2 we read, 'But for you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in his wings'. Christ came here to earth to emphasize healing; spiritual healing, to be sure, but he mirrored it with a great deal of physical healing to emphasize his great power over all the world. In Matt 9.12 we see that he came to heal the sick, not those who thought that they were well and did not need it. All of this healing power was really for us, for on the cross, when Christ physically needed to use that power on himself, he refused to do so in order that we might be healed. The healing power came only after he had died and had suffered completely. Then it was applied to conquer death; in doing so we all have the opportunity to live eternally with God.

Now we come to the point in our discussion where we want to talk about the Healing Church. The church's mission, like the mission of the chosen people, should be to heal the scars of the world. In Rom 15.1, those who are strong are to help with the infirmities of the weak. Christ praised those who visited him while he was sick (Mt 25). But to my mind comes the same question that Jeremiah asked: Is there no balm in Gilead? Are we also neglecting the caring, healing power that we have? Can we say that we are healers? Charles Swindoll in his book Dropping your Guard says that the Lord's army is the only army that exists that shoots their wounded. Again we come to this point: are we more concerned in lambasting sinners or saving them? Do we withdraw from those who are in need of help or do we draw close to them to support, comfort, and strengthen them? This is a matter for very serious consideration for each of us. Our every effort must be to heal those who are hurting, those who need our strength. We must reflect the healing concern of God to those around us.

Lastly, but certainly not least, we must consider the healing nature of heaven itself. Of course, in a sense we have come full circle, for this is really just the healing power of God. We read in Rev 21.3... And in the next chapter and the second verse: we read of the leaves of a tree which are for the healing of the nations. Thus, this healing is found throughout the Bible and must be considered a very important idea.

So far we have discussed the healing aspects of God, the nation of Israel, the Messiah, the Church, and Heaven. Now we must take a look at our individual responsibility with regard to healing. We need to think about it! Now I don't have all of the answers, and some of the answers are not right for all situations. I think everyone has felt the loss for words when someone has lost someone that they loved. What can we say? Anything that we might think of always backfires. What are the tools for our healing? What can we pack in our medical bag, our pharmacy?

Before we pursue this, let us think about a few Biblical examples of how the responsibility of healing was accepted. The first one that I think of is the parable of the Good Samaritan. Here is a case those who one would normally think of as 'spiritual' who did not care in the slightest for

healing. The priest and the Levite passed by on the other side! I am sure that they wished that they had not even come that way. It pained them to even see that man. They had absolutely no regard for his pain. Their mission, whatever it was, was much more important! How they could possibly think that they were doing the work of God, I do not know! But the man they both despised, the sinful Samaritan, a dog, had compassion and at the risk of his life and his valuables, and at some cost to him, he dropped whatever it was that he was doing that day and helped the man. His interest was solely in caring for his fellow man, no matter what race, no matter what faith, no matter how much it impacted his own life. Which of these showed the true good?

The whole attitude of the Pharisees seemed to indicate their utter disdain of healing as a good. To them, good was the rigid adherence to their own traditions, in spite of what God really wanted. Let us read Mt 9.9-14... What a horrible attitude toward what is really good! Healing was definitely not on their priority list: it was not important at all. We can not be this way.

The final case for our consideration is that of the rich man and Lazarus. Here was Lazarus, at the gate of the rich man, covered with sores, in much pain and suffering. I can see the rich man hating that fact, perhaps even using the back gate whenever he went in and out. But he obviously had no regard for the man's pain; he had no concern for healing anyone but himself.

The only good example that we see is the Samaritan. It is such a shame that there is so little thought to healing. We must incorporate it into our lives, caring for the feelings and hurt of others as though they were our own. Is this so difficult? Can we be any closer to what God is wanting from us than to do this? We must offer the great comfort, hope, and love of the gospel, and show that through Jesus Christ the healing of all who are his will be accomplished.