

## The Healing Church

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July 18, 2010

Acts: The Irresistible Church

Acts 3

### How important is healing?

Today I'm going to speak about one of the most important issues that occupy people's minds and takes an increasing bite out of our wallets. I'm going to talk about health and healing.

### Healing is important economically

In America, right now, we spend an average of about \$7000/per person/per year on healthcare. Healthcare spending is over 2 trillion dollars for our nation – more than 6 billion dollars a day is spent on healthcare. The growth of healthcare spending is outpacing inflation. In fact, companies and individuals have felt good in recent years if they can keep the annual rise of their health insurance costs under 20%. The most contentious political issue in years was the congressional debate over national health insurance. One out of every six dollars in America is spent on healthcare and that percentage just keeps going up.

### Healing is important personally

Of course, the issue of health and healing is not just important to us economically, it is important to us personally. If you are sick or in pain, if you have a loved one who is sick or in pain, health and healing may dominate your thoughts. There are few things that keep us from a full pursuit of life; there are few things that keep us from full engagement in relationships; there are few things that prevent us from a full pursuit of ministry more than the absence of health.

A few days ago I prayed for a woman, who was a missionary in Thailand for about a dozen years. She has been forced back to America because she has MS. She wants to return to serve the Lord in a country where she was making a difference in the lives of many orphans. But she can't because her MS is progressing.

The issue of health and healing can create desperation on our parts. If you are sick, or you have a child, who is sick, you can become desperate and easily taken advantage of by expensive, often bizarre treatments for pain management or for cancer. Alternative medical approaches have been springing up as people have become disillusioned with a thoroughly materialistic view of the human body that is divorced from spiritual reality. There are more and more practitioners of

healing auroras – people who claim to be able to balance or release energy within you using crystals or magnetic rocks. Many of the alternative practices range along the spectrum from good and wholesome to benign, but ineffective, to downright dangerous both physically and spiritually.

I started a series a few weeks ago from the book of Acts. I told you that I can think of no book in the Bible that provides more hope for the contemporary church than the book of Acts. What we are experiencing in the contemporary church in the West is a church in serious decline. Attendance figures are falling everywhere. The church's message is more and more marginalized in an increasingly pluralistic and irreligious culture.

The practice of healing is not just important economically and personally. The practice of healing is important ecclesiastically.

### **Healing is important ecclesiastically**

Healing is important for the church. What made the early church so compelling in a hostile culture was that the early church offered people health and healing. Now, a part of the health and healing that the early church offered was what I'm calling today "divine healing" – miraculous healing that came from God. Another part of the healing that the early church offered was the ordinary care for the sick through nursing and medical attention.

You see, there were terrible epidemics, terrible plagues that swept the Mediterranean world in the first few centuries following Christ. Many Christians behaved in ways totally opposite of their pagan neighbors. At the height of one of the great epidemics around 260 AD, a Bishop named Dionysius wrote an Easter letter about the heroic nursing efforts of local Christians, many of whom lost their lives in caring for others. Here is what Dionysius wrote:

*Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life extremely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred other people's death to themselves and died in their stead...*

He went on to say:

*The heathen behaved in the very opposite way. At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into roads before they were dead and treated unburied*

*corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease; but do what they might, they found it impossible to escape.*

Now, if you were an average person living in 260 AD and you and your family were faced with spreading epidemics over which you had no power, what group do you think you would want to ally yourself with – the Christians who would care for you, take you in, nurse you or your loved ones back to health, or the pagans, who would throw you out in the gutter, leaving your body unburied, run from you at the first sign of illness? It was healing, both divine healing and more ordinary medical and nursing care that made the early church so compelling and caused the church to explosively grow in the midst of great hostility. And it is health and healing – divine healing and more ordinary healing via Vineyard's three free medical clinics and dozens of recovery groups and counseling opportunities that can make the church compelling to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Today we are going to take a look at a remarkable instance of divine healing in a talk that I've titled The Healing Church. Let's pray.

### **Acts 3:1-10**

1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. 2 Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. 4 Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" 5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. 6 Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." 7 Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. 8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. 9 When all the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Now, let me set the scene by going back to Acts 3.1-3,

### **Acts 3:1-3**

1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. 2 Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.

Peter and John, the two most prominent apostles in the early church were going to the Jewish Temple at 3:00 in the afternoon to pray. Prayers were offered in the Temple three times a day – at 9:00 a.m., at Noon and again at 3:00 p.m. And at least at this point, Jewish Christians were not pushed out of Judaism by the non-Christian community. Peter and John and the rest of the Jewish followers who proclaimed Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah were still considered to be Jews in good standing with the larger Jewish community.

So they went to the Temple to pray. It is important to note that they did not go to the Temple to offer sacrifices in the Temple because the Jewish Christians believed that they had the one necessary sacrifice, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. They didn't need an animal sacrifice.

So they went to the Temple to pray and they saw a crippled man outside the gate which was known as Beautiful, verse 2:

### **Acts 3:2**

Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.

This gate is probably the one that the Jewish historian, Josephus, said was covered over with silver and gold. It was about 75 feet high. It had huge double doors. It was the main eastern entrance to the Court of the Gentiles. So here is this crippled man, he's outside of the Temple. He is sick and he is apart from the Jewish community.

Now, the text says that the crippled man was there everyday, verse 2:

### **Acts 3:2**

Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.

Assuming that it was Peter and John's practice to go to Temple Court each day at 3:00 p.m. to pray, they must have seen him, or at least repeatedly walked by him, on their way to the Temple. Now, what made this day different from the hundreds or thousands of days which preceded it? Why was the man healed this day and not the day before, or the week before, or the month before?

### **What two things are necessary for divine healing?**

By the way, I'm using the phrase "divine healing" rather than "faith healing" because the focus on miraculous healing needs to be on the Divine, on God, not on an individual's capacity to muster faith. So, what two things are necessary for a person to experience divine healing? Let's look at the text.

**Acts 3:4 - 8**

4 Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!"  
5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. 6 Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." 7 Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. 8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

The first thing that we note, the most obvious thing, is that:

**There must be God's activity**

The power for the healing came from God. The impetus that inclined Peter that day to reach out to the man was a divine impetus.

Now, as I asked before why that day and not the day before, a week before, or a month before? The man had been in this condition since birth. Why that day? Why did God suddenly move Peter that day to look at the man? Why did the divine power flow through Peter at that moment and not the million moments before?

The answer is we have no idea. Who can humanly fathom God's timing? He allowed the children of Israel to be mistreated in Egypt for 400 years before sending Moses as a deliverer to bring them to the Promised Land. He made Father Abraham and Mother Sarah wait decades before giving them their promised son. Who can fathom the timing of the Lord? On the one hand, God patiently endured centuries of rebellion from the nation of Israel, giving the nation ample opportunity to repent, before sending Israel into exile. And on the other hand, we find the Lord responding instantly to other acts of disobedience by bringing immediate judgment. At times the Lord seems slow in fulfilling his promises. At other times, the Lord responds immediately to simple pleas for healing.

Why today and not yesterday? Why should I believe God for a better tomorrow if what I ask for didn't happen today? This question is so basic to anyone wanting to have a relationship with the God of the Bible. This issue of responding to the timing of God is fundamental to anyone dealing with the God of the Bible. If you don't get this you really are going to struggle your whole life with God.

To have a relationship with God, you first of all must allow God to be God. What does that mean? The psalmist says in Psalm 115:3:

**Psalm 115:3**

Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

In other words, we have to approach God with the attitude that God, the God of the Bible, cannot be manipulated. There are no rituals, magic formulas, secret prayers, incantations, length of prayer, days of fasting, or sacrifices that will make God do what you want God to do. The God of the Bible is not an idol. An idol is something we pick up, move around and manipulate according to our desires, our timing, and our will. The God of the Bible is not the God of magic. Magic is something that we work; it is subject to our control.

There is nothing more basic, if you want to have a relationship with the God of the Bible, than approaching the God of the Bible as the utterly free God who does whatever pleases him. He must do nothing. With God it is never, if I do A, B, and C, then God will do D. He'll give me what I want. But he chooses because of his love and kindness to always act in love towards his children. God always chooses to bless his children. But he doesn't always choose to make us happy. And he doesn't always give us what we want when we want it.

You know, Christian hope is all about this issue of timing. God's Word says in 2 Peter 3:8-9:

**2 Peter 3:8-9**

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

And in Ezekiel 18:23:

**Ezekiel 18:23**

Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?

As a Christian, as I allow God to be God and recognize that my timing may not be God's timing, that I cannot manipulate him, I approach God with Christian hope saying to myself, "I may not have seen my son or daughter, my mother or father, my sister or brother, or spouse or friend come to know Jesus yesterday. But that doesn't mean that God won't move in their life today." Who knows? Who can fathom why the penny suddenly drops at one moment and not in the million previous moments?

I've had people come to me after sitting in this church for years and say to me, "I heard you say: I don't have to do anything for God to save me other than rely totally on what his Son Jesus did for me on the cross. I just have to rely on Christ." I respond: yes, you've got it! And sometimes I think: I've told you that every week for the past 20 years.

But mostly, I think to myself: who knows the ways of God? The wind of the Spirit blows where it will. Who knows why God keeps us praying for years? Or why Jesus taught us in Luke 18:1:

**Luke 18:1**

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

Maybe God keeps us praying to keep us near and dependent on him. Maybe he wants to do something inside of us and he is working in this other person's life something that is taking years to develop. Who knows the mind of God?

My point is that if you want a relationship with the God of the Bible, never say to yourself, "If it didn't happen yesterday, then it will never happen." It is not over until death. And for the Christian, it is not over even then because we believe in the resurrection of the dead. God may choose to say what he said in his Word in 2 Corinthians 6:2:

**2 Corinthians 6:2**

For he says, "...now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."

God may say to you, God may say on behalf of your loved one or friend: Now is the day of salvation; now is the appointed time; you've been praying for years and now, today, is the day of physical healing. You've been praying for your marriage and God says, now, today, this is the appointed time for something to move in your wife's heart, or your husband's heart. He may lift the cloud of deception that has gripped this other person's mind for years.

Having been a Christian now for 36 years I have watched over and over years of God's seeming inactivity and then, in a moment, radical change.

What two things are necessary for divine healing? It must, first of all, be God's activity which we cannot manipulate. And second,

**There must be human availability**

Why was the man in this story healed that day? He certainly wasn't expecting it. He wasn't even asking for it. We read in Acts 3 3-7:

**Acts 3:3 - 7**

3When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.  
4Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!"  
5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. 6Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." 7 Taking him by

the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong.

The man was asking for something totally other. He wanted some cash and God gave him something so much better than anything he ever dreamed of. He got his legs back.

Isn't this story absolutely true to life regarding our own experience of God? Listen, when I sat down next to Marlene in college, I just wanted to sit next to a pretty girl. I wasn't planning on hearing the gospel. I wasn't planning on getting saved. I wasn't planning on having my entire life turned upside down. I just wanted to sit next to someone who was good looking.

We think we know what we want. We want a date with a pretty girl. We want a job. We want a boyfriend. God wants something deeper. God wants a relationship with you that will last for eternity. God wants to reconcile long-standing broken relationships in our family. God wants to heal a memory or a trauma that you suffered decades ago. God wants to give us better gifts than any that we could give ourselves, any we could imagine for ourselves.

One of my favorite pair of verses in the Bible is Ephesians 3: 20 - 21:

**Ephesians 3:20 - 21:**

20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

This man asked for money, God gave him back his legs. And he not only gives the man back his legs, but the man is given back community. Here he is sitting outside the Temple and then we read in verse 8:

**Acts 3:8**

He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

This was something he had not done before.

You see, divine healing is healing of the whole person. Healing, divine healing, is the process of restoring wholeness to the whole person. It is not just relieving pain. That would be great. But divine healing involves healing memories, healing relationships, regaining hope for our whole lives.

Why was this man healed that day? God doesn't work in this world by himself. As I said there are two things necessary for divine healing – one is God's activity. Divine healing in the New Testament is not positive thinking. Divine healing in

the New Testament is not possibility thinking. Divine healing in the New Testament is not psychic energy or will power or crystal power or the manipulation of your aura or the re-balancing of your energy field. None of those things are what the Bible is referring to by “divine healing.” Divine healing is the result of God’s activity. And it is the result of human availability.

You see, God does not work in this world by himself. As Thomas Walker, the Bible commentator once said:

*The power for this healing was Christ, but the hand was Peter’s.*

Now, again, this is very basic to yours and my ability to have a relationship with the God of the Bible. I said before, if you want to have a relationship with God, you’ve got to allow God to be God. You can’t manipulate him. You can’t pressure him. But we must never think that God is going to do what he’s going to do with or without us. That is some people’s view of God’s sovereignty. But it is not a biblical view. Some people think that God is working, he is cranking out his will, and his will is going to be done with us, without us, in spite of us.

The amazing truth found in the Bible, friends, is that God invites you and me into relationship with himself. He invites us into dialogue. God invites you and me to pray in order to fulfill his ultimate purpose for our lives. And he invites us to pray so that he might fulfill his ultimate purpose in another person’s life.

John Wesley, the great founder of the Methodist Church, once said:

*God does nothing in this world except in response to the prayers of his people.*

I don’t think I would go that far, but it is very clear that there is a great deal that God won’t do unless you and I pray, or unless you and I choose to be obedient. See, it is the intention of God to partner together with you and me in bringing about his will in the world.

The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:9:

**1 Corinthians 3:9:**

For we are God’s co-workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.

Think about this. This is as mind-blowing as is the contemplation of the timing of God. Sovereign God, who could do everything apart from us, chooses to collaborate with us in the working out of his plans through our prayers. Now, this is awesome. All-knowing, all-wise God, who knows our needs before we ask, invites us to discuss our needs with him so that he can work together with us towards the meeting of our needs. God wants to use us as conduits for bringing his kingdom into the world. He doesn’t want to work around us, or in spite of us,

or apart from us. God wants to work through us – through you and me; through your obedience, in my obedience, through your prayers and my prayers.

Peter had to reach out his hand, grab this guy and lift him up. Peter was available to God. It is often said that the only ability that God looks for in people is availability. The man was a beggar. He asked Peter for some money. We've been there a hundred times. If you are like me, mostly when someone asks you for money, you say: No. You think: I'm busy; I've got places to go; I'm with my wife and family or friends. We're headed out to dinner. I don't want to stop. We think to ourselves: You know, I don't want to support this person's liquor habit or drug habit. Occasionally, for no particular reason, I will reach in my pocket and give someone some money, who stops me on the street. And occasionally, I've stopped and asked the person: Are you hungry? And when I've walked them over to McDonald's and bought them a couple of burgers and talked with them for a little while.

But rarely, if ever, do I stop and say: God, what are you doing in this person's life? Availability simply means that we allow God to interrupt us in our doing of life. Availability to God simply means that we believe in divine interruptions. What if we stopped when we saw something, or heard something that was a little unusual and we said: God, do you want to use me in this person's life? God, what are you doing here?

Occasionally, when I've seen someone crying in an airport, or sitting alone in Starbucks, I've said: God, what are you doing? Do you want to use me? And I've gotten the impression: Go and speak to that person. Ask them if they're OK. Ask them if you can pray for them.

You know, God speaks today through all that we are. He'll speak to you through your emotions by using all of your emotions – your compassion, your joy, your grief, your anger – to indicate what God might be feeling about a situation to push you to be involved. You'll have this wave of compassion or this wave of anger or a wave of grief. As you look at a situation you say: God is that you?

Sometimes God might speak through our imaginations. You might spontaneously experience a word, or a sentence, or a picture, or a vision, or a dream. God, is that you?

Sometimes God might speak through your spirit by giving you a hunch, an intuition, a feeling or an impression. God can speak through our memories by calling to mind something that you heard or learned in the past. God, is this you? are you bringing this memory to mind? God speaks through all that we are.

He speaks through our bodies when we experience sensations. We might feel or see or hear or smell or taste something and we ask: God, is that you?

I think that's what Peter did. He saw something.

**Acts 3:4**

**Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!"**

Maybe he saw this man's faith. Maybe he saw the Holy Spirit resting on the man. For divine healing to take place, we must have God's activity and human availability.

**What are not reasons for divine healing?**

**Divine healing doesn't depend on our great persons**

Look at this with me in Acts 3: 9-12:

**Acts 3:9-12**

9 When all the people saw him walking and praising God,  
10 they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.<sup>11</sup> While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.<sup>12</sup> When Peter saw this, he said to them: "People of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"

The source of healing is not us, it is God. Peter redirects people's gaze from himself onto the Lord. He deflects all the glory away from himself and points to Christ.

We almost always believe that healing occurs because an especially anointed person prayed for the healing. One of the best books I've ever read on the whole business of divine healing is a book that we carry in our bookstore titled:

***Doing Healing by Alexander Venter***

I would highly recommend this book to any of you who are interested in learning more about divine healing. In this book, Divine Healing, Alexander Venter writes this:

*As the early church became worldly with the loss of spiritual vitality and power some Christians [began to believe]...that: "If God uses you to heal, it is a sign of purity" and "God only uses holy people (saints) to heal the sick." A shift took place in healing ministry: from the many to the few was first from ordinary believers to deacons and elders; then to ordained priests; then only to priests who received permission from the Bishop; and*

*then to authorized exorcists and those recognized as holy. It ended focusing upon the one who healed people – “the royal touch” – the ultimate symbolic reversal of healing through the many. Kings and queens claimed divine authority to heal, not because of their virtue, but due to their position as monarch.*

Venter concludes by saying:

*This is a far cry from the simple healing ministry of Jesus and the early church.*

John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard, was often used by God to heal the sick. But he was so fierce about not letting anyone put him on a pedestal or to begin to believe that God was using him to heal because of some special virtue in him, or because of his unique holiness.

Once at a national conference in the 1980's a pastor got up during the Q&A session and he said to John: “You are an apostle with biblical signs authenticating your apostolic office. We should recognize this and call you an apostle.” And with a little smile, John looked out at everyone and said:

*I haven't even been an epistle of Christ. Now, you want to make me an apostle of Christ? People ask me if I'm taking America for Christ. I can't even take my own body for Christ. I am not anyone special. I'm just a fat man trying to get to heaven. We're all just servants of Jesus. It's all about him. We're here to do his ministry, not our ministry. In the Vineyard we all get to play because we all are called to do the stuff that Jesus did, the works of the kingdom.*

And this became almost a mantra in the Vineyard. It is not about us; it is about him. It is not about our great persons; it is about his great power and his great love. Look at what Peter says in Acts 3:16:

### **Acts 3:16**

By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

Jesus is the miracle worker. And it is faith in Jesus that releases the healing. And the moment we start talking about faith, we turn the thing back on ourselves. Well, it is his great faith. No! It is not faith in ourselves; it is not faith in our faith; it is not faith in our feelings; it is not faith in our own holiness. Faith is the bold expectation of healing for everyone. God has authorized us to heal the sick. It is the bold expectation of healing for everyone as we pray and seek God and at the same time, a humble submission of leaving the timing to God. We want it

now; we expect it now; we pray believing for now; and, we humbly submit to God when God says: Not now...tomorrow.

Healing doesn't depend on our great persons. And,

### **Divine healing doesn't depend on our great prayers**

Most of us don't know how to pray biblical prayers for healing or miracles. We often pray precisely in the way Jesus told us not to pray. In Matthew 6:7 Jesus tells us:

#### **Matthew 6:7**

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

Is it not the case that we fall into the trap of believing that God will release a miracle only through a lengthy prayer of ours? We think that if we pray longer, more fervently, or louder, or intensely a healing will come.

If you were privileged to spend an hour with a really great person – Nelson Mandela, Billy Graham, the Pope, or the President – would you do all the talking? Why do we talk so much when we are in the presence of an infinitely great person, namely God?

Many of us who have been praying for the sick for the last two or three decades have discovered that we see more healing when we say less. There is almost, it seems, an inverse relationship between lots of words and healing power. See, the more we're talking the less we're listening. One of the things we want to do when we pray for healing is to dial down and listen to God. What is the Holy Spirit saying to you? Is the Holy Spirit leading you to pray in a direction you weren't intending? Is the Holy Spirit beginning to reveal to you some underlying issues? Perhaps the physical problem that you are praying for is linked to an emotional hurt, or a psychological problem of the past.

The more the words, the less the listening. The less of listening, the less of healing. I know it is very uncomfortable to be a pray-er and be quiet. You feel uncomfortable in front of the person you are praying for. My internal feeling is: My goodness, they're expecting something from me. They are expecting me to say something and I'm not saying something. Sometimes to encourage the person, I will simply say: You know, it is just good to wait on God. I'm going to invite the Holy Spirit's presence and wait for a few moments.

I can't tell you how many times people have prayed for me with a prayer that was well meaning that was meant to make me feel good, but it wasn't a biblical prayer to God. Have you ever heard a prayer that goes like this: Oh, Lord, Rich, your

servant is in need. He's done so much good for others. He constantly labors. He is such a godly person. He deserves so much from you."

When someone prays like that for me, internally I feel worse. I think: Oh, God, have mercy on me. God don't listen to them. You know I'm not worthy of anything.

The longer they go on telling God about my holiness, the more unholy I feel. At the end of one of these prayers, I feel like falling on my face before God and tearing my clothes and say: God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

It is not our great prayers. Divine healing comes because of God's great grace. God doesn't need to be told the specifics of a medical condition. He knows far more than any doctor. Just ask the person where it hurts.

Friends, if you want to learn more about divine healing – maybe you have someone in your family who is sick; maybe you are struggling with an illness and you wonder what God might be up to because you've prayed; maybe you are a person who just wants to learn more about how we in the Vineyard approach the whole subject of divine healing. We are going to be hosting a seminar on divine healing on Saturday, July 31<sup>st</sup> at 9:00 a.m. It is going to be taught by some of our best teachers on the subject: John Cook, Mike and Sue Burkett. So you might want to put that on your calendars.

### **Healing I**

**Saturday, July 31<sup>st</sup> at 9:00 a.m.**

**Teachers: John Cook and Sue and Mike Burkett**

Finally,

### **What must be added to divine healing?**

Divine healing needs an explanation.

### **Acts 3:13 - 20**

13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. 14 You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. 15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. 16 By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see. 17 "Now, brothers and sisters, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. 18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. 19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that

times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you— even Jesus.

You see, no miracle, no healing, no great act of God is self-explanatory. Someone has to stand up and explain the miracle to the watching world. You see, mere facts don't explain themselves. There are always other ways to look at facts. Yes, you prayed, but maybe it was just a spontaneous remission of the cancer. Maybe the fact that you are better is the result of changing your diet. Maybe it was your positive attitude.

I remember when a friend, Mike Husch, was healed of epilepsy. He had epilepsy for 20 years. He was suffering from three gran mal seizure a week and hundreds of petit mal seizures every week. He was on 62 pills a day. Mike was prayed for in 1989 and from the moment he was prayed for he never had another gran mal seizure again. He was gradually weaned off his medicine.

A few years after Mike was healed, he talked with neurologist and said: Let me tell you what happened to me. He described the experience of having a few Christians praying for him and it felt like a tornado was going through his body. It was quiet, but very powerful. He knew that something had changed inside. He was healed.

So he asked the doctor: What do you think about that?

The doctor, with a condescending, pitying tone, said to Mike: "Oh, Mike. It wasn't the prayer. Your medication finally began to take effect."

He was on 62 pills a day. He had been medicated for 20 years. But suddenly, at the precise same moment that he received the prayer, he was instantly and forever healed.

Mike, it was just a coincidence. Maybe you've heard that. You are not receiving answers to prayer, it was just a coincidence. I love one response to the claim that answers to prayer are just coincidences. A person said: Maybe so, but all I know is that when I pray, coincidences happen and when I don't, they don't.

We need to explain miracles. In the Bible miracles do not, in of themselves, produce faith. In the Bible many people see a miracle and they persist in unbelief. Just read the gospels. In the gospel of Mark, Jesus does these extraordinary miracles. Some people are astonished. Other people ask disbelieving questions. Others conspire to kill him. Still others are afraid. Others demand that Jesus leave.

In addition to healing, we always must have explanation. Always in the gospels we have demonstration accompanied by proclamation. Works of God must be accompanied by the Word of God, if there is ever going to be any faith.

Let me be clear. A healing will not in of itself produce faith – either in the person who is healed, or in their family, who see the healing. We always think that if mom or dad, my sister or my brother, saw me or my child healed, they would absolutely believe. It's not true. Healing alone does not produce faith to save. I've prayed for a number of people who were not Christians and who were totally healed and yet either they didn't come to saving faith, or after some initial movement to Christ, they backed away and we never saw them again.

Romans 10:17 tells us where saving faith comes from.

**Romans 10:17**

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

And so Peter preaches. He doesn't let the healing speak for itself. Instead, he says: You have dishonored Christ in four ways.

**Acts 3:13-15**

13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. 14 You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. 15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.

And I want to consider two ways that we dishonor Christ in closing. Listen to Peter's message. First of all, verse 14:

**Acts 3:14**

14 You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you.

Peter said you traded Christ for a murderer. How do we dishonor Christ? We trade the holy, righteous Jesus Christ for a murderer, namely Satan. Jesus Christ comes to us all the time saying: I want to bless your life. I've come to give you life and that more abundantly. I want to offer you freedom. I want to offer you wholeness. I want to offer you well-being. Obey me and you will be set free. Follow me and you will be made whole.

But we trade Christ in for a murderer. We trade him for Satan's purpose for our lives. Satan's purpose is always to destroy. He wants to destroy your family. Satan wants to destroy your reputation. Satan wants to destroy your marriage. He wants to destroy your freedom. Satan wants to destroy your health.

How often, friends, do we turn our backs on the holy and righteous one, namely Jesus Christ, and trade him in for a murderer.

And the second way we dishonor Christ is found in verse 15:

**Acts 3:15**

You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.

We separate ourselves from the author of life. Jesus says to you and me: plug yourselves into me and you will experience life worth living. But you have to be plugged into me. Turn to me; look to me; welcome me into your morning. Welcome me into your day. Invite me into your moments – good and bad. Invite me in to your work, to your disappointments, to your struggles, to your commute to work. Invite me.

We say: no. I'll do life on my own. I will do this relationship on my own. I'll do this business deal on my own. I will do my marriage on my own.

We see ourselves dishonoring Christ, the call is to repent. Acts 3:19 says:

**Acts 3:19**

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

Change your mind about Christ. Change the direction of your life. Stop dishonoring him. Stop disregarding him. Plug your life into him and times of refreshing will come. God loves to heal. He wants to heal our whole persons. When the church is a healing place, when the church is full of people who are healed, the church becomes compelling in a hostile age. Let's pray.

## The Healing Church

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Rich Nathan

July 17-18, 2010

Acts: The Irresistible Church

Acts 3

**I. How important is healing?**

- A. Healing is important economically
- B. Healing is important personally
- C. Healing is important ecclesiastically

**II. What two things are necessary for divine healing?**

- A. There must be God's activity
- B. There must be human availability

**III. What are not reasons for divine healing?**

- A. Divine healing doesn't depend upon our great persons
- B. Divine healing doesn't depend upon our great prayers

**IV. What most must be added to divine healing?**