

The Miracle Worker and Healer

Miracles, Health, and Healing Series

A Sermon by the Rev. Peter Buss, Jr.

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“Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised...” (Luke 7:22)

Healing miracles. A man who was blind—who would not go far by himself, who couldn’t enjoy the spring flowers, or watch a show, or even see the faces of the people he loved most—had his sight restored to him (Mark 8:22-26). Imagine his joy. A person who was lame—who couldn’t go for a walk, couldn’t run an errand for a friend, needed to depend on others for many of the basics of life, and was stuck in the same place year after year after year—was made whole (John 5:2-9). Imagine his new lease on life. A person with leprosy—who had to live apart from others because he was believed to have a communicable disease, who was considered an outcast, who wasn’t welcome in the places most others went because he was unclean—implored the Lord to make him clean, and miraculously, it happened (Luke 5:12-14). Imagine his eagerness as he returned to his family. A father watched his boy plagued by a “deaf and mute spirit”; he couldn’t hear, he couldn’t talk, and he often became violent. In his desperation, the father cried out to the Lord for help, and the Lord healed the boy (Mark 9:14-29). Imagine the father’s relief and gratitude. Imagine the boy’s joy in hearing all the sounds of life. Two sisters—who have watched their brother die, who are gripped with the grief of loss—see him raised from the dead; not gone but restored to them. Imagine their tears of happiness as they embrace him and realize that all will be well.

The healing miracles of the Lord, as recorded in the New Testament, are some of the most poignant and beautiful parts of the Word of God. We can so easily see the pain, the appeal for help, the amazing change for good, and the profound gratitude that happens as a result of the healing. The opportunity we have before us is to see these stories as the tools for healing that they can be in our own lives.

Today we embark on a six week series called “Miracles, Health, and Healing,” during which we will explore these five healing miracles that we just reviewed. It is true that the Lord has the power, and has given us the means, to get rid of the parts of our experience that cause us the most suffering. There can be the same joy, new lease on life, eagerness and energy, relief and gratitude, and tears of happiness. To the extent that we understand these stories, we can cooperate with the Lord to achieve greater and greater levels of spiritual health.

Today we focus on the One who can work these miraculous changes in our spiritual lives—the Lord Jesus Christ, the One God of heaven and earth, the Miracle Worker and Healer.

“Are You the Coming One or do we look for another?” I love the way we are introduced to the Lord in our story for today. He was engaged one day in one of the two primary activities to which He set Himself while in the world—healing (the

other being teaching). He had just raised a young man from the dead and restored him to his grieving mother. Naturally news of this miracle spread with lightening speed throughout the surrounding region, as people said to one another, "A great prophet has risen up among us" (Luke 7:16). The disciples of John the Baptist heard about it and told John. John sent them to Jesus with a telling question: "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" By the time they got there, Jesus was surrounded with crowds of people—people with all kinds of ailments—and He was healing them. Imagine these two followers of John walking through these pockets of people, some still discovering their new abilities, others talking and pointing, others still waiting their turn to be healed. Finally they would have made their way to Jesus, to ask the question they had been instructed to ask, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'" (Luke 7:20). Jesus, it seems, kept healing for a little bit. Then He stopped, and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (John 7:22).

Let's focus in on that question that John had these followers of his ask Jesus, because it centers our attention on a kind of questioning that many people today can have in their spirits. "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" Consider a man who has grown up in today's world, as so many do, with some religious involvement in his family of origin, but nothing that has stuck, nothing that has truly made sense to him. He's done all the things that so many people do: made it through school, launched a career, got married, is busy raising a few kids... But there are problems. There's too much argumentation in the household. He feels like there's a growing wedge between himself and his teenage kids. He and his wife sure could use a renewal of their relationship too, because things have become distant between them. In general, life doesn't seem to have much purpose or direction, and there's this growing anxiety that it's all going to unravel sometime soon. So he and his wife, both well-meaning, have made the decision to try religion again. One day they show up at a congregation like this one. I picture this desire to find a church as part of John the Baptist's message in today's world; his was a message of return, of repentance, of doing according to the Jewish Law, specifically the Ten Commandments or the heart of that Law. In today's world, for many that looks like a testing out, perhaps for the first time as adults, this whole religious thing that they were introduced to as kids. But now with adult problems, and adult questions, there can be this wonderment: "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" Is the Lord God really here? Is this path going to help, or should we try something else? Can the Lord help me with my life—with all its issues?

Remember Jesus' answer. He continued healing for a little while, then stopped, and said, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard..." (John 7:22). Sure enough, as this couple talks to others who ascribe to this faith they find that it seems to be working for them! One talks about the tools for healthy relationships she's found here. Another mentions a marriage seminar that this church put on which really helped him and his wife. Another—an older woman, shares with them a small snippet of a message about her husband's death, and how she's longing to see him again in the life to come, confident that their marriage will continue. Another says she's never found more powerful tools for life-change and personal spiritual growth than she has here.

What this couple comes to discover is that healing is taking place here. They don't need to "look for another." The Lord is here, and He is helping. They stay, with the hope of receiving some of those tools—some of that healing themselves.

The healing of our spirits. So let's focus in on this Coming One, specifically on His ability to perform healing miracles. Why was it so important for Him to engage in this activity?

We read in the Writings for the New Church:

In ancient and former times...when worship consisted in outward ritual, or the symbolic Church of the Lord was made up of outward ritual, then there were open miracles.... The reason was thatby means of them [people] might be led into inner things.... But at this day it is not so—open miracles have ceased..., for the reason that no belief is acquired by miracles. (*Spiritual Experiences* 2433, 2434; cf. *Divine Providence* 131)

We read further, "All the miracles which the Lord performed when He was in the world were signs of...people receiving the Gospel and being spiritually restored to health" (*Arcana Caelestia* 7337). What this teaching makes clear is that everything the Lord did on earth was symbolic. He intentionally engaged in physical acts of healing to show the ways in which He helps people now. He helps us now by healing our spirits. It's not that He couldn't heal our bodies with a miracle if He wanted to, but that's not His focus. He does that through doctors and medicine and a range of healing practices which He inspires. But His focus is on the healing of our spirits.

Thinking symbolically, then, the Lord was saying to the disciples of John, that He has the ability to take away spiritual blindness, or a lack of understanding; He can make people whole in terms of their spirits, and able to "walk" in His commandments or do His will; He can cleanse the parts of us that are unclean; He can take away a disobedient spirit, symbolized by deafness, and remove the influence of evil spirits from our lives which causes that spirit of disobedience in the first place; and through it all He can remove spiritual death, or damnation further and further from us, giving us true heavenly life instead, as He leads us through the process of salvation.

Believing in the Lord as Healer. In order for us to receive that kind of healing, there are certain things that we have to come to know and believe concerning the Lord, and then certain things that we need to do.

Thinking first about the things that we need to know and believe, it is useful to focus in on, believe it or not, the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Here's the reason, or series of reasons:

First, "Father" is the name given for God as Creator, the God of the Old Testament, the Infinite, unknowable, majestic Ruler of the Universe. This is the part of God that is, in many ways, unknowable, beyond our comprehension. What we do associate with God through this lens is omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, immensity, eternity, majesty (see *True Christian Religion* 17, 49). This is the Miracle Worker of the Old Testament—causing the sun and moon to stand still (Joshua 10:12-13), parting the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21), causing the walls of Jericho to fall down (Joshua 6:20), coming down on Mt. Sinai in a cloud with thundering and

lightening to give the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:16-20).

Coming back to the Lord as Healer, we hear a teaching that indicates the first of three things that we need to believe about the Lord to be able to receive His healing help—a quality that parallels the Lord as “Father”. People who were physically healed by the Lord had to “[acknowledge] His Divine omnipotence, and that He was God” (*Apocalypse Explained* 815). In essence, the question before each of us is this: “Do you believe that the Lord has the power to help you?”

Second comes the powerful realization that this God of the Universe is aware of and focused on each one of us as individuals. This brings us to the second part of the Trinity, namely the Son. Despite the appearance of a second Divine Person, Jesus Christ on earth is the embodiment of the One God in human form. What He shows us about Himself is His closeness, His compassion, and the individual care He takes of people. In this regard we need go no further than the story we are focusing on today, of the Lord healing many people of their ailments.

So the second thing that we are asked to believe about the Lord is that He is with us, aware of our concerns and worries, attentive to the pains in our lives, full of compassion and a desire to bring goodness. We read further in the quote from the Writings for the New Church about these three things that we are to acknowledge the Lord from contemplation (*Apocalypse Explained* 815). Contemplation is the activity of thinking, considering, reflecting. Did not the Lord, by means of His life in this world as “the Son of God” show that He cares about individuals, knows about our hardships, and sets Himself to make their lives better? This passage says that contemplation leads to acknowledgment, and “all acknowledgment from contemplation makes another to be present” (*Apocalypse Explained* 815). The task here is to consider the Lord, to bring Him into our thoughts, to welcome His presence through such things as prayer, reading the Word, and the like—with the belief that He hears us, and He cares.

Third comes the Holy Spirit, which is the activity of the Lord, often silent, in our lives. One passage says that the activities of the Holy Spirit “include the acts of renewing us, bringing us to life, sanctifying us, and making us just; and depending on the outcome of these in turn, the Divine actions and powerful effects also include the acts of purifying us from evils, forgiving our sins, and ultimately saving us” (*True Christian Religion* 142). The Lord as Father is all powerful. The Lord as Jesus Christ is our close and intimately aware God. And the Holy Spirit is this same God actually making a difference in our lives.

The third thing, then, that we are asked to believe about the Lord is that He can actually heal us. If He can, and He wants to, He will!

There is a condition, however. It says in this passage we’ve been referring to that actual healing only take place only “by looking to His Divine omnipotence and by repentance of life” (*Apocalypse Explained* 815). If we want something to change in our lives, the Lord can do it, but not without our involvement (see *Divine Providence* 1114).

In truth, the specific things that we need to do to receive healing from the Lord will be spelled out for us over the next five weeks, as we take up a miracle of healing blindness, then one on lameness, followed by one on leprosy, one on a

demon-possessed boy who could not hear or speak, and finally one in which a person was raised from the dead.

For today, we have focused our attention on the Miracle Worker and Healer Himself—the Lord Jesus Christ. We have reminded ourselves that He is omnipotent, that He is closely present, intimately aware, and full of a compassionate desire to take all pain and suffering from our lives. We have also reminded ourselves that He can and does bring healing to our lives when we acknowledge these things about Him, and cooperate with Him in the life-change that He leads us through.

Our task for this week is to further contemplate the Lord, with the goal of firming up our acknowledgment of Him, for “acknowledgment from contemplation makes another to be present.” A question we can ask ourselves, and turn over in our minds is this: “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” To what extent do we really believe that the Lord is able to help? The final part of our contemplation can come in the form of observation—seeing the ways that the Lord has helped other people, remembering the ways He has helped us, and confirming within ourselves: “the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised...” (Luke 7:22). Then we will be truly open to the ways the He can heal our blindness, our lameness, our uncleanness, our deafness, and raise us up into ever increasing levels of spiritual health, as He forms us for heaven.

Amen.

Readings from the Lord’s Word: Luke 7:18-23; *Arcana Caelestia* 7337; *Apocalypse Explained* 815.

Luke 7

¹⁸Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things. ¹⁹And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to ^fJesus, saying, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

²⁰When the men had come to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'" ²¹And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight.

²²Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. ²³And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

Arcana Caelestia 7337

All the miracles which the Lord Himself performed when He was in the world were signs of the future state of the Church. Opening the eyes of the blind, for example, and the ears of the deaf, loosing the tongues of the mute, enabling the lame to walk, and making the maimed whole and the leprous too, were signs that the kind of people meant by the blind, deaf, dumb, lame, maimed, and leprous would receive the Gospel and be spiritually restored to health, which would be accomplished by the Lord's Coming into the world. This is what Divine miracles are like as to the inward form they take.

Apocalypse Explained 815

There were three reasons why faith in the Lord healed people; first, because they acknowledged His Divine omnipotence, and that He was God; secondly, because faith is acknowledgment, and from acknowledgment mental contemplation; and all contemplation from acknowledgment makes another to be present; this is a common thing in the spiritual world. So now, when a New Church was to be established by the Lord, it was this contemplation from an acknowledgment of the Lord's omnipotence from which they were first to look to the Lord; and from this it is clear what is here meant by faith. The third reason was, that all the diseases healed by the Lord represented and thus signified the spiritual diseases that correspond to these natural diseases; and spiritual diseases can be healed only by the Lord, and in fact by looking to His Divine omnipotence and by repentance of life. This is why He sometimes said, "Your sins are forgiven you; go and sin no more." This faith also was represented and signified by their miraculous faith; but the faith by which spiritual diseases are healed by the Lord can be given only through truths from the Word and a life according to them; the truths themselves and the life itself according to them make the quality of the faith.