

Sermon Title: All Those Healings!  
Scripture Text: Mark 2:0

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 2-4-18

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I'd like you to come to the Gospel of Mark, please, and as you look for where we are today, we're going to talk right in the white space between the end of Chapter 1 and the beginning of Chapter 2, hence I've given this the reference Mark Chapter 2, Verse Zero. If you were to dig through dusty old things and find a series that I've done before, you would find a very similar sermon at Matthew Chapter 8, Verse Zero, and at John Chapter 5, Verse Zero. And here's what's going on: at every turn in the Gospel of Mark, we are seeing him build up more and more evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That's what he said the whole thing was about—Chapter 1, Verse 1. Mark describes, in the process, many miracles performed by Jesus. Just in Chapter 1, we have seen an exorcism—He cast out a demon from a man in the synagogue; we've seen the details of two healings and we've seen references to countless more healings. When we enter Chapter 2, we're going to see one of the more famous miracles of Jesus, along with a very powerful statement of how miracles fit into His ministry.

So today is an interlude in the series of Mark. You might say it's all introduction and no sermon, but instead of forward progress in Mark, this is a theological overview of the subject of healing. It's all over the ministry of Jesus. Healing sick people was a prominent part of His earthly ministry, but it was never the main point (see Jn. 4:13-14; 6:27, 48-50). Do you realize, everybody Jesus healed went on to die? The healing wasn't the point. But, why all those healings? And why don't we see things like that happening now? Well, since healing was such a prominent part of Jesus's earthly ministry, and especially the time of His ministry that we're visiting now in Mark Chapters 1 and 2—The Great Galilean Ministry—it's a good time to study this subject so that you can make the most of the rest of Mark and the other gospels as you work your way through.

Now, as we come to the subject of healing, I want to acknowledge there is much debate about this, and there is a tremendous amount of profoundly carnal controversy over the spiritual gift of healing. That gift is mentioned three times in 1 Corinthians Chapter 12—to hear some people talk, you'd think it was about three times per page in the whole New Testament. The debate, by the way, isn't limited to healing; there are similar issues with all four of the so-called miraculous gifts, which include healing, miracles, tongues, and interpretation of tongues (see 1 Cor. 12:9-10, 28-30), but we're only going to focus on healing today.

And almost always with these arguments, you see certain characteristics. Most of the time, most people who study this will set out with a desire to *prove one position*. On one extreme, you have people who vigorously try to validate their own activities (see 1 Cor. 14:4, 12, 26), so they resort to almost anything to try to prove that what they're doing today matches what Jesus did in His day. There are others who are so threatened by even exploring the possibility that such a thing could happen today, they resort to irrational, defensive, unloving, name-calling counter-proofs. You also find that almost everything written on the subject, or preached on this subject, usually fails to deal with all the data available. So, when I tell you things about healing today, I'm going to invite you to take what I tell you and match it up with every single case of healing you see in the Bible, and see if it fits (see Is. 8:20; Acts 17:11). We can't cover them all today, but I want you to think it through. The good news is, there are some valuable exceptions; there are some people who deal with all of the data.

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You'll also find that these discussions are sadly tainted by the presence of charlatans in our world who make it very hard to discuss the subject without it turning into a discussion of personalities. It doesn't matter what personalities are involved—it's *What does God's Word say?* that matters. So, my goal is to help you understand what the Scriptures say about healing. Every experience we have, every claim of healing, has to be understood within the framework of Scripture. God never does anything contrary to His revealed Word (see Num. 23:19; 2 Sam. 7:21; Ps. 138:2 with Is. 48:11; 2 Tim. 2:13).

We have all these healings in the gospel, so I'm going to give you a very simple outline. Number One: How does healing work? And, Number Two, I'm going to deal with three questions that I think demand answers and are worthy of addressing, even as limited as our time is.

So the first question is: How does healing work? Well, let's go look at the one that did the most. Of all the healings recorded in the Bible, probably 99 percent of them were done by Jesus, so let's look there. He set the pattern for the spiritual gift of healing; He did a tremendous amount of it. You will find six characteristics of Jesus's healing ministry, and as I say, you can try these against all the records of all the healings in all the gospels and actually elsewhere in the Scriptures.

Number 1: Jesus healed with a word or a touch. Now, usually He touched people. Last week we saw Him touch the leper. That was pretty amazing because you didn't go around touching lepers, but He did. He also could heal with a word. In the case of Peter's mother-in-law, He did both. He spoke and rebuked the fever and then He grabbed her hand and pulled her up, so it was a word *and* a touch in that case. There is a case in John Chapter 4 where Jesus healed a nobleman's son. There's a case in Matthew 8:5-13 where He healed a centurion's servant, and when He did it, He did it by speaking a word from miles away. And then Mark 5:25-34—we'll see it when we get there—that's where the woman who'd had a hemorrhage for 12 years was healed just by touching Jesus's cloak, without Jesus even saying or doing anything. And He said, remember, He was in this great crush of people and said, "Who touched Me?" And His disciples are saying, "Uh, Lord, have You noticed—You've bumped into about 70 people in the last three minutes! 'Who touched Me?' Well..." There was a healing by the touch. Jesus healed with a word or a touch—there didn't have to be any other shenanigans involved, just a word or a touch.

Secondly, Jesus healed *totally*. You can check this out; every healing Jesus did fits this. There was never a recuperation period. The cure was *always* total. You go over to Luke 5:24-25 and it says this: "But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—so, the healing isn't the point; the healing was to show that what He said was true! It's easy to say, "Your sins are forgiven." Anybody can say that, but, can they do this? So it says, "He said to the paralytic"—so, a *paralyzed* man—"I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home.' Immediately he got up before them, and picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God" (NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted). He was totally healed.

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[Number 3: Jesus healed instantly (see Matt. 8:3; 20:34; Mk. 2:12; 5:29, 42; Lk. 13:13; etc.).]

Number 4: He healed with a word or a touch, He healed instantly, He healed totally, and—Jesus healed everyone He desired to, at will. You don't see that today—not anywhere, not ever. There were never lines of disappointed people left to be carried back home from a healing meeting of Jesus, or to be taken in their wheelchair or on crutches. You listen to the testimony of our good friend Justin Peters: born with Cerebral Palsy, and went to a Benny Hinn healing thing, and honestly, openly went to be healed—this was before he began investigating the whole movement and discovering that the entire thing is a fraud. What do they do with people like Justin? They greet them, and then they put them behind a curtain at the back of the auditorium where nobody can see them, and they *never, ever* get to the front of the line.

That's not the way the gift of healing operates. Luke 4:40—"While the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and laying His hands on each one of them, He was healing them." That's how the real gift operates. Or, Matthew 4:23, talking about that same time in Jesus's life: "Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people." So He healed everyone that He chose to. Now, where He was going into new area—the Word of God was going there, the gospel was going there for the first time—healing flowed freely. And where people were embracing Jesus, even if they didn't understand all of what that meant, He healed generously. But, it's interesting that, where people were rejecting Him, where the popular bandwagon to jump on was to blaspheme, Jesus sometimes withheld healing. On the heels of the declaration of the total rejection of Him by the leaders of the Jews, we read in Matthew 13:58—"He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief." What's that? Does it mean that their unbelief limited His power? No, it means that Jesus believed what He taught. He didn't cast pearls before swine (see Matt. 7:6)! "If you're hating Me, rejecting Me, saying I'm doing it by the power of Satan, what am I going to do by doing it more, when you've already seen that?" It's not because His power was limited, it's because He is sovereign and omniscient.

It's also interesting that, Jesus very often healed people with no evidence of faith on their part. That's a significant thing, because people today say, "Well, the reason you're not healed is, you don't have enough faith." Perfect copout! It's the *perfect* copout for admitting, "I can't heal you." That's not what Jesus ever did. He sometimes used healing to stimulate faith—look in John Chapter 2, John Chapter 4, John Chapter 5. Last week, we looked at the passage where He healed a leper who came to Him and called Him Lord and he said, "If You're willing, You can make me clean," and Jesus said, "I am willing, be clean," and the guy was instantly healed, and then he immediately showed his true colors; he ignored a direct order from the Son of God *and* he completely flouted the Law of God that he'd known his whole life. He knew if he was ever healed of leprosy, there was a procedure to go through with the priests, right? And Jesus said, "Don't go tell anybody about it, go show yourself to the priest." What did the guy do? "Ha! Forget the priest! I'd have to walk to Jerusalem for that! I'm going to go out and mess up Jesus's plans by telling everybody about..." In other words, he proved he was an unbeliever by flagrantly disobeying God (see 1 Jn. 2:3-4), and yet Jesus healed him. You don't have to have faith to be healed—you have to have the sovereign plan of God to heal you.

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The point is this: no case was beyond Jesus's ability to heal. Only His sovereign will ever tempered the use of His healing power.

So what are these characteristics? He healed with a word or a touch, He healed totally, He healed instantly, He healed everyone that He desired to at will, and, Number 5: Jesus healed organic diseases. When Jesus healed, there was no room for doubt about what had happened. He didn't cure nonspecific annoyances or functional disorders like headaches or non-specific lower back pain. Now, trust me, when I have a headache, I like getting rid of it, right? You ever got a crick in your back? I mean, getting rid of that—that's a *good* thing. And Jesus may have cured any number of headaches or low back pain or stubbed toes or whatever, but, He cured diseases like leprosy; diseased, dead, malformed tissues; crippled legs; paralysis; congenital blindness; bleeding; stuff like that. There was no doubt when He healed.

Now, there's something you need to understand here. Can somebody go somewhere and hear somebody say something, and they say, "You know, I've just had this horrible headache for two days," and they go away, and the headache is gone? Yeah! And, you know what? That's a cool thing! That's perfectly fine. But is it the spiritual gift of healing? Here's an important point: most illnesses—and you could argue all—have a certain psychosomatic element to them. What do we mean by "psychosomatic"? Well, "psycho" means you're crazy—no, "psycho" is from the Greek word *psuche*, for your "soul"; *soma* is the Greek word for your body. Your body and your soul interact; the physical you and the nonphysical you have a connection—a very strong connection. You can go through a very difficult physical time, and, can it cause you to be depressed? Yes, it can, because your bodily situation can affect your psyche, your spirit, your feelings, and all of that. Can you go through a very difficult time emotionally, and it affects your body? Absolutely, it can. Long periods of stress, sleep deprivation, it will lower your body's immune system's ability to fight things off.

But, that connection is what makes way for "the placebo effect." The placebo effect is *very real*—but it's *not* miraculous. Many dietary supplements and homeopathic treatments work for some people, at least to some degree, primarily because of how strongly people believe they will work. Now, what do we do when we, as objectively as possible, test a new drug? How do they do that? You do a "double blind study," okay? You get a couple of groups of people together, they volunteer, they have the situation that the drug is supposed to affect. Maybe you can even have three groups. You have some groups you do nothing for, or one group you do nothing for; another group, you may give them a pill and say, "This is part of the study for curing whatever '-itis' you might have," and then you give the other group a pill and you tell them the same thing. One group gets a sugar pill, the other group gets a pill that has the chemical in it that they're testing for it. And you know what happens? A lot of people you do nothing for *get well*, because you're going to get over every disease you have except the last one, okay?

Now, that's just normal routine. But you can look at that—what is a normal course of recovery with no treatment at all? Then you look at the people that you give the sugar pills to, and, you know what? They get better at a better rate than people who don't get anything! That's the placebo effect. That's your mind working on your body to accelerate a healing process.

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I'm not against the placebo effect. If it works—fine! And then, if you get a significant *increase* in how many people get better, or how much faster they get better with the drug, then you have validated that the drug actually works, and unless all the people that got better also grew a third eye, then maybe you put the drug on the market, right? You can test these things. Well, that's the placebo effect; psychosomatic effect, or somatopsychic effect—I like to invent that word because it works both ways. The fact of that flings open the door to manipulation and superstition; it flings open the door to quack doctors, home remedy peddlers—"snake oil salesmen," they used to be caricatured as in the Old West—and "faith healers."

The healings of Jesus, the healings by Jesus, never left any doubt because of the kinds of things that He healed. No one today is doing what Jesus did. And what I mean by "no one," I mean "*no one*"—not one single individual *anywhere* on the planet has this gift operating as it operated with Jesus (see Ex. 34:10; Jn. 3:2; 15:24). When modern faith healing was just becoming widespread—and by the way, this wasn't that big of a deal until a hundred years ago or so, but—there was a very famous faith healer whose name you would probably recognize if you're over 40, and there was a desire to validate this ministry. A medical doctor by the name of William Nolan decided to investigate this. He was not setting out to prove anything Biblical; he was doing an objective investigation of this healing. He went to this healer, and with the permission of the healer, he secured 80 people who volunteered for his research—they volunteered to be tested after they would have been in the "healing" process, or in the "healing" service. And they were—all 80—allegedly healed by this very well-known faith healer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in America. Dr. Nolan tried to get people where there was an official medical diagnosis—that helps; I mean, do we have x-rays or blood tests or anything like that from *before* that, and then they've gone and they've been healed, and then you can do follow-up blood tests, follow-up x-rays, etc. You want to take a wild guess what his findings were? *Zero* for 80! Now, that's not a small sampling, my friend. Zero out of 80—*except*, it was worse than that. Many of them were *far worse off* months after they were supposedly healed, because they had spurned medical attention that might have helped them. Some of them were terribly embittered. Friends, I don't say this because I hate anybody. I say this because I love people, and I don't want people getting ripped off! And healing today is a rip-off.

Well, Jesus healed with a word or a touch, He healed instantly, He healed totally, He healed everyone He desired to, at will, He healed organic diseases, and finally—here's one that's kind of a deal-breaker for people today: He raised the dead! That sort of covers it. Luke 7:11-16, He raised a dead man from his coffin on the way to the cemetery. I would love to do that just once! We buried our patriarch, the oldest living man at Heritage Bible Church, last Monday. That would have been cool to bring him back and keep him around—what a show-and-tell that would've been! Mark 5:41-42—we're going to see that when we get there—He's going to raise the daughter of the synagogue official shortly after she died; or there's the granddaddy of them all, John 11, where Jesus raised His friend Lazarus *after he had been dead for four days*, and he was in the tomb. And do you remember, it's one of the *classic* King James translations anywhere—Jesus said, roll back the rock, and remember what [Martha] said? "Lord, by this time he stinketh" (vs. 39). He called him from the tomb, and some people have even said that Jesus was careful to say "Lazarus, come forth" because if He hadn't said "Lazarus," every tomb in the place would have emptied out! I don't know if that's true or not.

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But listen—with every intention of a pun to help you remember, I want you to have *grave doubts* about every claim of resurrection that some people have made in the last few decades. I had a guy contact me years ago who wanted to put our radio program on the air in Australia, and he was talking about—they had a couple of resurrections, there was this outbreak of the Holy Spirit, there's this great revival going on and there had been three documented resurrections, and I said, "Show me the documentation." "Well, you know...you can't find the person, there are no eyewitnesses..." In other words, *it's fraud!* It doesn't happen. They *never* check out.

And, by the way, you should also reject out-of-hand the claims of people who say that they've been dead and then they've come back to life through medical resuscitation efforts. Now, can someone have vital signs that are not there, and be revived? I'm sure that can happen. And I have no doubt that people have had bizarre experiences when they have gone through something like that; they can have visions, they can have all sorts of things—and I don't mean "visions" in a revelatory way, but the chemistry of your brain, your brain can do things...you ever had a weird *dream*? Okay? I had one the other night, it was sort of like an elephant was sitting on me...it *wasn't*, I checked, and the elephant was in his bed where he usually is. The point is, if they've come back, they weren't dead, okay? "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27; cf. Jas. 2:26). There has not been a proven resurrection since the days of the apostles. I don't say that because I'm not in favor of it! I say that because it's *true*. The faith healers in our generation *do not spend their time or put up their ads at funeral homes*. They don't go to cemeteries; they don't even go to hospitals, unless they're sick—for very good reason.

Now, based on that little synopsis of the healings done by Jesus—and please, go ahead and check them out against the summary of characteristics I've just given to you; all the healings of Jesus, check them out. It's clear, no one today heals like Jesus's healings illustrate in the gospels. Now, here's an important point: healing was *never* the main point. Never! Luke 5—we already went there once, but notice what He says in Verse 24—"But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—and then He heals a paralyzed man. The purpose of the healing is to validate the message of the gospel! That's why "all those healings"! (see Ex. 4:1-5; 1 Sam. 12:18; 1 Kin. 17:22-24; Mk. 16:20; Jn. 2:11; 3:2; 5:36; 10:25, 38; 11:4, 15, 42-45; 14:10-11; Acts 2:22; 4:29-30; 8:6; 14:3; Heb. 2:3-4)

Or, there's the one that we already saw in Mark, remember? He came out of the synagogue, He went to Peter's house, He healed Peter's mother-in-law; at sundown, when the Sabbath was over, they could bring people—they brought *countless* people to Him, and He healed them and healed them and healed them and healed them, well into the night. He gets up early in the morning, He goes off to pray by Himself, and a crowd starts gathering outside Peter's house—bit surprise. And the disciples come and find Him and they say, "Lord, let's go back, all these people are there," and in Mark 1:38 He said to them, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for." It's the *message* that He came for! The healings are there to validate the divine authority of the message, and now we don't need that validated because we have the full revelation of the Scriptures (see Jude 3; 2 Jn. 9-10).

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But even at *that*, if anybody wants to have that gift, fantastic! When I dismiss the service, go stand by the front door. We'll drop off our eyeglasses, our crutches, our wheelchairs, our walkers, our pacemakers, our orthotics—you can have them all, we'll donate them to people that don't have enough faith to believe! If you have that gift, you would be using it.

Here's one: John the Baptist. We'll be getting to this when we get further into Mark. John the Baptist had the privilege to be the first prophet in 400 years and to introduce Jesus to the world. He baptized Him; that was that glorious thing we saw in Mark Chapter 1. And John the Baptist probably had the standard Jewish eschatology of that day as a view of the end-times. The Messiah's going to come, He's going to throw off Rome, He's going to set up a kingdom, Hallelujah! And John didn't understand that there's going to be a Messiah who is going to come and He's going to be here for three and a half years in public, and then He's going to be crucified and then He will rise again and ascend to the Father and send the Holy Spirit, and then after a couple thousand years or more, *then* He will come again and set up the kingdom. And so John didn't understand that, and John introduces Jesus and I bet he's thinking, "Wow! I can't wait! Kingdom—here we are!" And six months go by and he's still baptizing and preaching the kingdom and pointing people to Jesus and then—John gets arrested! And he's saying, "*That* wasn't on my agenda!" So he's starting to wonder...and he's a prophet! Matthew 11—look at this. The point is, healing was never the main event. It says in Verse 2 of Matthew 11—"Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ"—what would that be? The miracles, all these things He's doing—"he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, 'Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'Go and report to John what you hear and see:'"—they heard the message, and what did they see?—"the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.'" So Jesus quoted from Isaiah to help John the Baptist understand that all His miracles were to validate His message that He is the Messiah. The miracles weren't the point! The point was, "the gospel"—the miracles were to validate the authority of the message and the messenger (see Rom. 15:18-19; 2 Cor. 12:12).

Now, there's a legitimate point for discussion: it's the idea that others who heal might heal a little bit differently than Jesus, and that's worth exploring in the Bible, so let's ask, Who else in the New Testament healed people? Are there people who don't happen to be the Son of God who healed? Yes, there are. The primary group is the Apostles, whom Jesus sent out to preach. You can read about that in Matthew Chapter 10. Later, He extended that same authority to a group of 70 others, and He sent them out two-by-two to preach. Notice, He sent them to *preach*, and as they preached, He gave them the authority to do the things that validated what they were preaching. Now, were there others? Yes, there were a few very close associates of the apostles during that same generation; it's a pretty easy list to give you: Barnabas, Philip, and Stephen. Barnabas went with Paul on his first missionary journey—he did some unspecified things, we don't have the details, but he did signs and wonders (Acts 13-14); Philip cast out demons and healed people who were lame and paralyzed, Acts 8; and Acts Chapter 6, Stephen performed also unspecified signs and wonders. And, *that's all*. Even in the apostolic era, the gift of healing was not commonplace—never was.

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And, in the New Testament—here's a very important point—the gift of healing is never used in a church. The gift of healing was not for keeping Christians healthy and happy (see 2 Tim. 4:20). It was always associated with Christ, the 12 Apostles, the Apostle Paul, the 70 that He sent out during His ministry, and those few close associates of the apostles. The gift of healing was *very* limited as to who possessed it, and it was always used in situations on the cutting edge of spreading the gospel—it was never meant to be the commonplace experience of Christians. And by the way, you also need to know, the same characteristics are true of the healings of everybody other than Jesus who healed in the New Testament. Check it out again against all the records of the healings; every time you have any details, you'll find they healed with a word or a touch, they healed instantly, they healed totally, they healed everybody, they healed organic diseases, and they raised the dead. Now, it's also important to notice that all—not just Jesus—who had this gift *operated it at will*. They could choose to do it, but it operated only during a period of several years in the very infancy of the church.

Now, here's the point of this big download of data: unless you see the Biblical characteristics of healing being manifested, don't call what you see, "the gift of healing." Now, a closely-related point is that, if a person who claims to heal has bad doctrine in other areas, you know that it's a person who's not speaking for God, and nearly everybody these days—I'd say probably you could say everybody—who claims to have a gift of healing today preaches aberrant doctrine on other things. So, point made. How does healing work? Well, you've seen six characteristics.

Now, just a few minutes—some questions demanding answers.

First: Is the gift of healing operating now? The answer is: No, it's not. And there are several reasons that I can give you for that. First of all, *nobody* is manifesting those characteristics of Biblical healing. I mean, that answers the question. Anything that *is* going on isn't that thing, whatever else it might be. The use of the gift of healing in the New Testament times was confined to evangelistic situations—people going out into the world and preaching the gospel. Gifts of healing today, that are *supposedly* gifts of healing today, it's always "You come in here to my controlled environment—I'll sort out which ones of you we hide behind the curtains, and which ones will get up here on the stage;" it's operating for a very limited time. The gift of healing was not exercised in some cases, even in the early church era, and those claims that God wants every Christian healed—well, they just don't hold up (see 1 Tim. 5:23). Before the first service this morning, Bruce Smith showed me a video online of Gloria Copeland telling people that "You don't need a flu shot. We don't have no flu season around here—we have a deer season and an elk season and a duck season, but we don't got no *flu* season because God already gave you a shot!" In other words, *ignore* reality and facts and evidence, but don't you go get that flu shot! That would basically be a lack of faith, right? Better not get near some people that I know that have compromised...It made me want to go sneeze in the right place at the right time on the right day around the right person to make a point, but, that would probably be carnal.

In Philippians 2:25-27, Paul mentions that Epaphroditus, one of his good friends, was ill—"sick to the point of death" (vs. 27). Wait a minute—doesn't Paul have the gift of healing? Yeah!

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But, is the gift of healing for keeping your Christian friends healthy? No. Epaphroditus certainly didn't have a lack of faith; he certainly didn't lack spiritual maturity; it wasn't because there was nobody around with the gift of healing—the fact is, he just wasn't healed...not miraculously. Now, he got well by the grace of God, in the providence of God and in God's timing, and that in itself is irrefutable evidence that even in the first generation of the church, the gift of healing was never meant to keep Christians healthy. It was for validating the evidence when the gospel goes to a new place. Similarly, at the end of his life, there's another one of Paul's friends that he mentions—2 Tim. 4:20. As Paul's about to die, he says, "Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus." Another one of his friends! Well, Paul why didn't you heal him? That's not what the gift of healing is about.

The purpose and the time of the gift of healing was *limited*. If the gift was for keeping Christians healthy, then why all the dead Christians all these centuries? I mean, if it's only a matter of faith, and you can be healed of anything, why don't we have at least maybe *one* token member of each church who's 200 years old, just to be an example of faith? Paul's friend and protégé Timothy—he suffered "frequent ailments" and stomach problems; Paul didn't heal him; he said, Timothy, take care of yourself and take a little wine for your stomach's sake (1 Tim. 5:23). Healing, as it's seen in the New Testament, was never part of mainstream Christianity since the apostles. It disappeared with the apostles, it has never been seen since, and everyone who *claims* healing power today is preaching bad doctrine—usually, a corruption of the atonement of Jesus.

So, what do you call it when you have a person who preaches false doctrine and they do something in a thoroughly unbiblical manner? You can call it what you want to, but it's *not* a biblical gift! And I'll go further—it is also *fraudulent*. Now, I should mention, tangentially: there are *similar* issues that apply to the biblical gift of tongues; I'm not going to talk about that now, we have a times past, but what I'll say for now is that the New Testament gift is the ability to speak in known human languages that you've never learned (see 1 Cor. 14:10). And that doesn't happen today. We have available a pamphlet titled, "What is the Gift of Tongues?" Clever title. Help yourself to one on your way out this morning.

Another question that is legitimate to ask. So often you hear, when you say that the biblical gift of healing isn't operating today, you get accused of denying the power of God. The biblical gift is not operating now—another question, though, is: Does God heal today? The answer is: Well, yes! Yes, He does. God is God; He sometimes intervenes in human affairs in ways inexplicable to science, okay? That's a miracle. If you can explain it by science, it's not a miracle. Years ago, I got a call on a Sunday night; the son of some Christian friends of ours was stricken with a rare and deadly situation—I think it's called Reye's Syndrome—that attacks the brain and the nervous system, and it's why they tell you, "Don't give aspirin to young kids." Their little boy was about eight years old. This was, by the way, the son of a medical doctor. And, all I remember was this word I had never heard before. He'd been sick with something else and this was a known possible complication that happens sometimes using that medication. I was with the family at the hospital when the doctor came and told them, "This is very, very serious." And he gave them those words that no parent wants to hear: he said the prognosis is not good.

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At that time, the boy was delirious, he had an extremely high fever, and just as the doctor was explaining this, he began to have convulsions. The doctor explained that, "We don't think he's going to make it through the night, and, if he does make it, he will probably have severe brain damage." The little boy was a genius. And they said if he did survive, it was going to be days before he would probably come around enough for them to be able to find out how much damage had been done. Well, I started praying. Oh, but I saw something more effective than my prayers—I saw a mom go into motherly hyper-drive. She elbowed past everybody else, she pushed some stuff out of the way, she climbed up onto the hospital bed, she wrapped her arms and legs around her little eight-year-old boy to try to help control the convulsions, and she alternated praying and softly singing hymns to him. You couldn't have gotten her away from him with a Taser and six strong men. We put him on the prayer chain. He walked out of that hospital the next day—his genius IQ fully intact, he had no lingering effects. I think he went on to graduate from Stanford at about age 19 or so.

Now, most of the time, that's not how it happens. Most of the time, God uses other means. In His providence and in His perfect love and wisdom, He's going to allow you to go through precisely what He wants you to go through in order for you to be more mature in your faith (see Job 23:10; cf. Ps. 119:71, 75). And sometimes, He chooses to let you live with a physical problem. Now, I'm not going to take another tangential trip on this, but another passage worth looking at when we have time is James 5:14-16. That tells a person who is sick—especially if he or she believes that the reason for the illness might be God's chastening for continued sin—to call for the elders of the church and have them pray over him and to confess the sins. What that passage means is that we should get such a person the best medical help available—that's what anointing with oil refers to there, I think (see Is. 1:6)—and at the same time, we should pray for him and, if there's sin involved, it should be confessed. But that passage has nothing to do with the gift of healing. That's the sick person calling for the elders to pray, that's not somebody going around and saying, "Here, sicko, sicko, sicko, you come to me and I'll heal you." The point is, God does heal whenever He wants to—but He usually works through providence, not giving people gifts to allow them to heal as His agents, at will.

Another worthy question: Does God heal today *miraculously*? Well, yeah, I just gave you an example. There was no explanation! All the evidence that all the doctors at that hospital had that night told them this boy's probably going to die, and if he doesn't, it's going to be horrible for him and for his parents. But what I mean is, does He heal today without any human or medical involvement? Yes—when it is His will. But, don't be intimidated by people who say that, if you deny the validity of so-called "healing" ministries, you are limiting God, or, you have a lack of faith. I'm not limiting God, I'm just trying to understand what He says and what He does. I'm not quenching the Holy Spirit. I don't have a lack of faith. I'm being honest with the Word of God and with the evidence of history, and the fact is, today's alleged "faith healers" *flunk* the test of Scripture! It's that simple. Do you see how understanding this makes the record of the miracles in the gospel *all the more spectacular*? Miracles and healings, by definition, are very rare and they are *very* important. And do you see how tragic it is for people to be deceived about these things?

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Time after time—I don't know a pastor committed to Scripture that hasn't had this experience, unless he's only been a pastor for six months or so—time after time, I hear of people who come toward the end of their life and they're absolutely devastated and their faith crumbles when they become chronically ill or terminally ill because they've been told the lie that the reason people get sick is a lack of faith. Have you read Paul's biography, by any chance? If the biblical gift of healing is around today, *let's use it!* And then next week, we'll take up a love offering to help out the doctors and nurses in town that we've made unemployed, as soon as the real healers have emptied all the hospitals and the nursing homes. But, they don't function that way.

So as our study takes us next time to a dramatic healing that Jesus did, let's appreciate how truly unique He was. And I come in the spirit of 1 Thessalonians 5:21—"Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good." Now, all of this, says the guy who has sent you several emails this week asking you to pray for people who are sick! "Why would you do that if you don't believe the gift of healing is operating today?" Well, if I had the gift of healing, I wouldn't waste my time sending you an email, I'd hightail it over to that person's house and make them well! But is it good, is it legitimate, is it right, to call upon the Lord God Almighty and to lift one another up and ask for the merciful touch of His hand and His grace? Of course it is! And, who knows when He might intervene and do something shocking to the doctors?

It's okay to pray for healing. I do it often. But pray even more for God's glory. Pray for the salvation of souls. Remember, all those people Jesus and the apostles healed—they all died. So the question was, did they come to faith in the Savior who healed them? Are they with the Lord now, or are they not? That's what matters.

*Oh, Father, all those healings in Your Word...every one of them speak of Your power, Your glory, Your mercy, Your grace. And, Father, I know there are people here that are suffering from, and frustrated by, physical maladies far worse than mine, and I just pray that You would encourage them by Your grace. And, Lord, if You would see fit to restore limbs, relieve paralysis, drive away infection, restore eyesight, take away pain, Oh, how we would thank You and glorify You, but, above all, please, do not let anyone leave this place apart from trusting in You for forgiveness, for righteousness, and for eternal life, for we pray in the name of that One who gives life—Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

END OF AUDIO