

# **St. Mary's Sermon Series**

**John 5:1-15**

**Spiritual Gifts:  
Healing**

Healing is a vast subject that we cannot possibly do justice to in a single sermon. Healing miracles play a significant part in the gospels. If you were to remove them from the Bible altogether then you would have to remove large sections which would be very detrimental. Despite this we are told, on more than one occasion, that all the miracles which Jesus performed are not even recorded. Several times the writer concludes a particular incident in the life of Jesus by saying that Jesus healed **all** those who were sick. The writers clearly have had to be selective and choose just some of the healings which Jesus did to include in their accounts of his life.

According to the gospels, there seems to be a vast range of ailments that Jesus dealt with. Nothing was too small or considered to be too minor for Jesus to heal, but equally nothing was too big or difficult for him to heal either. He was happy to sort out what we would probably term as being fairly minor problems; for example the fever which Peter's mother in law had when he turned up for lunch one day: to long term major disabilities like blindness and like the man in our reading was suffering from. He was also able to deal with spiritual problems like the forgiveness of sin as well as physical ailments.

I found it very difficult to choose one particular healing miracle for this morning and in the end I plumped for "the healing of the invalid man" from John chapter 5.

John, we know, was very selective in his choice of material and only includes seven signs in his gospel. From this we can conclude that all the stories he relates are highly significant. John understood that the works that Jesus did during his life on earth were important signs that the kingdom of God had come in real power through his ministry.

I'm not going to say a lot about this miracle this morning but just want to highlight three points briefly.

1. Jesus' question, "Do you want to be healed?" to the man is very interesting. After such a long period of illness the man might have given up hope of ever getting well again. He might have resigned himself to spending the rest of his life being crippled. He could even have become angry and resentful, resigned to his fate and adapted to his way of life to such an extent that he didn't want to change. If he was healed it would mean radical changes to the way he lived and he would have to earn a living.

It is exactly the same for us today; it is possible to give up hope of ever becoming well again. In one sense it is even easier for us today, given the benefit system, we have to give up hope and settle for life as we know it.

Jesus would ask us the same question this morning Do you want to get well?

2. Notice that the man did not directly answer Jesus question, instead he withers on about being unable to get himself into the water and that someone else gets there first. Perhaps it's because Jesus sees sufficient faith, both in that answer and in the fact that he was still lying there after such a long time with little hope of being successful, that he commands him to pick up his mat and walk and the man readily obeys.

3. Notice where this miracle takes place. Like most of the miracles Jesus performs it is not in the synagogue but simply in the course of his every day life. We should be open to what God might want to do through us wherever we are and be willing to offer to pray for people we meet who need healing. Healing is often a sign to the non believer that God is real and active and is interested in them.

We are very blessed today in benefiting from a highly skilled medical profession. We are right to look to the skills of our doctors and nurses for healing in the first instant. Despite this, there are many conditions which they are unable to cure. God can and still does heal today. Personally I do not see a conflict between the two. God can heal through the medical profession and he can heal directly.

As a family we have twice experienced something of God's gracious loving, healing touch. As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, our eldest daughter Candice was born with "Clicky Hip", which meant one leg was longer than the other so she had to have a block in one of her shoes. I mentioned too how Di had witnessed her shorter leg grow as she was prayed for.

I think that I have also shared Elspeth's story with you before: When Di was pregnant with Elspeth we went for a routine scan to the hospital. Di was very worried by what she saw and specifically questioned the nurse about it. It just looked as though there was a big hole where the baby's top lip should have been. The nurse dismissed Di's concerns by saying that sometimes the scans are not clear and that if the baby was born with a cleft palate it could be corrected with a simple operation. Shortly after this appointment we went to Chorleywood for a conference and Di went up for prayer and received the laying of hands on her bump!!

Elspeth was born normally. However her top two front teeth didn't grow until she was nearly two and when we took her to the dentist he remarked about the scarring in the roof of her mouth. About five or six years ago we invited a team from Chorleywood to our church in Worthing to teach the church about prayer ministry. The lady who had prayed for Di was part of the team. She had completely forgotten that she had prayed for Di and was amazed at what she was told. It was the job of another lady in the team to study scan pictures and she asked if we still had the picture of Elspeth's black hole. When Di showed her the picture she confirmed almost certainly Elspeth had a cleft palate which had been healed in the womb.

As well as experiencing God graciously and lovingly healing within members of my family, we have also known the pain and anguish of him **not** healing a family member. As many of you know I had a sister who was born with a rare, genetically inherited, severe and physical disability. Ruth never developed any muscles which meant she had very little control of her body and needed 24 hour a day care. Mum and dad both knew that there was little that the medical profession could do to help her but also believed that God had the power and could heal Ruth. On numerous occasions they took her to a healing service, not just in our own church but also in many different ones. Despite receiving anointing with oil and the laying on of hands many times, Ruth's condition never improved. Despite her on going suffering Ruth's own faith never wavered, she never ever complained and I would go as far as to say that God gave her enormous strength to cope despite everything.

One day while mum was giving her a bath without warning Ruth died peacefully. We saw this as Ruth receiving her perfect healing. We know that she is with the Lord, whom she loved, that she has received her new perfect heavenly body and is complexly free from the suffering that marred her earthly life. Why God chooses to heal some and not others remains a complete and utter mystery. Sometimes, God doesn't heal people because he has a completely different understanding of suffering to ours. Sometimes he allows us to experience suffering in order to teach us things that we, in the ordinary course of our lives, could not learn. Catholic theology acknowledges the possibility of redemptive suffering, which we see supremely worked out in the death of our Lord Jesus. I think there is a lot that we could learn from this.

At the end of the day God is sovereign. Even Jesus was not able to heal everyone.

The healing ministry is sometimes given a bad press and I want to finish this morning with a couple of brief comments about this.

1. Sadly I have heard accounts of those who have sought prayer for healing being blamed for lack of faith when they have not been healed. We must resist any temptation to blame those asking for prayer. It is more likely that the lack of faith, if there is any at all, is in those doing the praying rather than those asking for prayer!
2. There are all kinds of people out there who claim to be able to offer healing and I could say a lot more about this. Personally, I am very wary of anyone who claims to be a **faith** healer. Paul never refers to healers but to gifts of healing. The focus is never on the healer but always on the compassion and love of God who is the source of all healing.

If, after reading this, you would like to share a testimony of how God has healed or would like to pray for God's healing with someone please contact the Rev. David Stevenson on 01773 710770 or Rev. Liz Murray on 01773 713978. Naturally, all calls will be dealt with in complete confidence.