

Why Doesn't God Heal Me?

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[0 : 00] We may have heard this last week, South African celebrity pastor Ray McCauley died. And many of you will have known of Ray McCauley and his teachings.

And no matter what you think of his theology or his teaching, it's always a sad thing. And we, of course, think of his family at this time as they grieve him. His family, they withheld the cause of death.

They weren't forthcoming about it. And it's fine, you know, it's their business, it's private. But the reports indicate actually that it was a long illness that Ray suffered from, which apparently started sometime last year.

He had to go to a number of hospital visits. But if you think about it, that's a little bit ironic, given that he devoted his life to teaching the message that God doesn't want Christians to be sick.

He was a leading proponent of the health and wealth gospel, or the prosperity gospel. And he is quoted as saying, faithful Christians should never have to suffer sickness in this life.

[1 : 10] It is not God's will. That's what he taught. The only reason Christians are sick, the health and wealth gospel teaches, is because of a lack of faith. If you're sick and you're a Christian, it's because you're not faithful enough.

That's what he taught. And yet he died of an extended sickness. If that was true, that would make many of us right here today very unfaithful Christians, wouldn't it?

Because there are many people I know right now amongst us who are suffering, who are sick. You know, whether it's cancer, whether it's a chronic illness, whatever it is.

We, in fact, buried two of our number this week, who both of them had suffered extended illnesses in their life before they died.

Why? Did they not have enough faith? Well, that's what Ray and others would say. You see, the health and wealth teaching bases their theology on passages like the one we have in front of us, where Jesus heals people who have faith in him.

[2 : 24] And, of course, they say, well, he does the same today. Why shouldn't we expect him to do the same today? Other Christians on the other side of the spectrum will say, no, no, we shouldn't expect physical healing, at least in this life.

And these healings that we read about are just signs of spiritual healing that Jesus has really come to give us. And so there's this divide in Christian teaching.

And you, if you listen to sermons, you listen to different Christian teachers, you will hear people on both sides of this divide. And the question is, you know, can we ask and expect God to heal us in this life?

And it's a question that sooner or later we're all going to ask if you haven't asked it yet, because we're all going to get sick. And if we can't expect God to heal us in this life, why can't we?

Well, I think those are questions that this passage is going to force us to think about this morning, and a careful reading of it will help to answer them.

[3 : 34] And so let's see what we discover as we read these healings, that Jesus, after he comes down to the mountain, from just preaching this amazing Sermon on the Mount, he encounters these broken people.

What do we learn? What does God want us to learn this morning from these stories? Well, first, I think, and I think this is where the health and wealth gospel gets it right.

Bet you never expected me to say that from this pulpit. First thing we learn here is Jesus is both willing and able to heal us. Jesus is both willing and able to heal us.

So as I was reading these stories this week, the first impression that I got was how much Jesus really wants to heal people. Do you notice that as we go through these stories?

He doesn't avoid. He goes to. He wants to heal these people. So he's approached by a man with leprosy. Now, we don't realize what a big thing that was. In the ancient world, leprosy was a terrible disease, incurable and highly contagious.

[4 : 43] It was a serious disease. And there were laws, you can read them in Leviticus, in the Old Testament, Israelite laws, about how people with leprosy had to go and live away from everyone else.

They were outcasts. They had to go live in leper colonies. And they could have no contact with people in the town. And so we read in verse 2, Right away, a man with leprosy came up and knelt before Jesus saying, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

Now, just for him to approach Jesus was highly unorthodox. There would have been people gasping. There would have been people running away in that moment.

It was quite a shocking moment. And he says, Lord, if you are willing, you can understand his hesitancy, because any self-respecting Jewish teacher would have stayed away from him.

But not Jesus. Look what Jesus does. Verse 3, Do you realize what a big gesture this was?

[5 : 51] To touch a man with leprosy, to touch a man with such a terrible, incurable, contagious disease. And yet Jesus wants to show that that's not going to stop him from helping this guy.

And then he says, I am willing. Be made clean. I am willing. Another translation is, I want to. I want to make you clean.

I want to heal you. Imagine those words to that guy, what they would have meant. The next story is a centurion.

Now, a centurion is a Roman military leader. They led a detachment of about 100 men, hence centurion. But he's also hesitant to approach Jesus. His servant is sick.

And the reason for his hesitancy is because he's not a Jew. He's a Gentile. And the Jews and Gentiles did not mix. They did not get involved in each other's lives.

[6 : 51] Even though the Romans were the overlords at the time, the Jews did not allow them to get involved in Jewish affairs. And they try to avoid each other. And so, notice that he doesn't even ask Jesus anything at first.

He only approaches him and tells him the situation. Kind of hoping that Jesus will get the hint.

Right? So, from verse 6. Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed in terrible agony.

Wink, wink, nudge, nudge. Can you do something? Maybe? But he doesn't even ask. Because he knows he has no place to ask a Jewish rabbi to heal. And he knows, you know, we're Romans.

We've come and we've messed up these people's lives. We've come and we've taken over. We occupy this land. How can I ask a Jew for help? And so, he doesn't even ask.

And when he... And look what Jesus says, though. He says to him, Am I to come and heal him? Or another... Other Bible translations might have there, I will come and heal him.

[8 : 00] And both could be true from the original language. We don't quite know whether Jesus was asking the question, Am I to come and heal him? Or he just made the statement. But if he was asking the question, Am I to come and heal him?

It was a good question. Because it was totally inappropriate for Jesus to go into this man's house.

And that's what his reply is. From verse 8, the centurion basically says, Of course not.

Of course I don't want you to come and heal him. But I know you can still do something. And he does. Look at verse 13. Then Jesus told the centurion, Go.

As you have believed, let it be done for you. And his servant was healed at that very moment. And then, the next account is in Peter's house.

Jesus is just trying to get home from the mountain. Okay? Just think about it. This is what it's like to be Jesus now. He's just trying to get home, and there's a leper.

[9 : 02] There's a centurion. He gets to Peter's house. There's his mother-in-law. Then a whole bunch of people come afterwards that evening. It's a busy day for Jesus. But he goes into Peter's house, and his mother-in-law is in bed with a fever.

Now, what's interesting about this one, nobody asks Jesus to do anything. Which kind of strikes me, because Peter has been walking with Jesus the whole day.

He's been seeing him heal all these people. He knows his mother-in-law is in bed with a fever.

Jesus arrives at his home, and he doesn't say anything. Like, doesn't he like his mother-in-law? I don't know.

The text doesn't say. Maybe he was getting to it, and he just didn't have a chance. But the point is, Jesus knows she's in need, and without even being asked, he goes in. In verse 15, he touched her hand, and the fever left her. And then she got up and began to serve him. And then, as I said, even after the busy day, Jesus probably now just wants to chill and have a bribe with his disciples.

[10:11] But no. Verse 16, He healed all who were sick.

That was a busy night. He didn't have any time to himself. But, you know, throughout all of these stories here in chapter 8, what strikes me is how Jesus seeks out and really wants to help people. Do you see that? He comes into this broken world, and He doesn't avoid the brokenness. He seeks it out. And He really wants to help people, no matter who they are, no matter what barriers they are, no matter how inappropriate it is for them to associate with Him.

He wants to help them. I mean, imagine. Imagine all humans were like that. that whenever we had the ability to help someone else, we did.

Whenever we had the power to actually make a change in someone else's brokenness, we sought them out, and we did that. I mean, in South Africa, many of us have the power to help other people who are in desperate need.

[11:29] But imagine everyone was like Jesus. and help them, no matter who they are, no matter whether or not they deserve it. Well, that's what that's what Jesus did.

And this is God. Jesus came here to reveal to us God's heart. This is your God. This is the God who made you. He's a God who really wants to help us.

He really wants to help us in our needs, in our brokenness. He doesn't sit back and look down and go, shame, well, I hope you figure it out.

Right here, He's revealing He's a God who wants to come in and touch us and get His hands dirty and actually really help us. He wants to.

That's His heart. And also what we learn in these stories is that Jesus is completely able to help us.

[12:29] Nothing can limit Him. Not the leprosy of the first man, which was a disease that was incurable at the time, nor the distance of the second man, the centurion's servant.

Even though he was far away, Jesus never even met him, but He healed him with a word. And these men knew that there were no limits. Somehow, at this point even, these two men knew this about Jesus.

So we see the leper says, Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean. I know this. I know You can do it. And the centurion from verse 7, this is amazing, his response.

Jesus said to him, Am I to come and heal him? And He said, Lord, I'm not worthy to have You come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed.

For I too am a man under authority, having soldiers under my command. I say to this one, Go, and he goes, and to another, Come, and he comes, and to my servant, Do this, and he does it.

[13:35] You see, this military commander knew the authority of the man standing in front of him. He knew it was much more than his authority, even as a Roman centurion, because he knew that Jesus had the same authority in the unseen realm.

You know, that dimension of our world that we cannot see, but we know is there, that affects our lives on earth day to day. He knew that Jesus had the same kind of authority in that unseen realm as a military commander has with his troops.

That same kind of unquestioning authority. I was fortunate that I never had to go to the army because I left school after it wasn't compulsory anymore, but I know many of you did military service, and I've heard stories of the commandant.

You know, I've heard stories about how the commandant's word is law in the army. You do not question him, you do exactly what he says when he does it, no matter what he asks you to do, and that's how it is in most militaries, unquestioning obedience, and this military man realized that that's what Jesus had in the unseen realm, that his word there was law, and that nothing could question him and his authority, authority, that what he wanted to be done would be done, that he could control circumstances in our world that we cannot control.

This man who was used to authority looked at Jesus and he knew this was a man who had control, control over the things we cannot control in this world. I want you to think about that for a second.

[15:29] Think about that. You know, we live in a world where there's so much out of our control. There's so much that could happen to us that we can't affect. There's so much happening in the

world beyond us, beyond what we can see that we don't know, we can't control, we're so used to it, but think about this.

Jesus is someone who can. Jesus is someone who you can know in your life, who makes himself available for you to know, who is fully able to control the circumstances of your life.

Even more now that he has ascended to the right hand of the Father and at his ascension, we read at the end of Matthew, he says, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

All authority. There's nothing he can't do. And you can know him and he is able to control the circumstances of your life too and he is able to remove the effects of brokenness in your life and he wants to.

That is who Jesus is. In fact, that is the very reason he came. That's the reason he came to earth.

[16:43] To remove the effects of brokenness in your life. Now you might say, no, no, no, no, no. The reason he came to earth was to die for sins so that I could be forgiven of my sins and be in a relationship with God.

Yeah, sure, but to what end? Why? So that you could stay broken? Unhealed? No. The reason why Jesus came to die for sins is so that you can be restored and be and live a life that God has always intended for you to live.

To be restored. That was his goal. Coming to earth. And that is why Matthew concludes the way he does in verse 17.

All of this happened so that what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled. He himself took our weaknesses and carried our diseases. So it was prophesied that he would come and heal us.

It was prophesied. Isaiah 53. This is a well-known prophecy in Isaiah about the salvation that the Messiah would bring when he came to earth. and Matthew quotes it here to show us that his salvation includes physical healing.

[18:01] Okay, so it sounds like the health and wealth gospel is right, doesn't it? God does want to heal us. Even the prophet said that's why Jesus is going to come.

Okay, so if that's true, why am I not healed? Why do we still suffer? Why do you still have a chronic sickness? Why do you still have cancer?

If all this is true, if this is what God wants and he's able to do for us. Is my faith not strong enough? You might think that, but I want to tell you today, that is not the reason.

It's not anything to do with your faith. No, the reason we still struggle with these things is because despite the fact that Jesus wants to and is able to take them away, there is something that he is even more concerned about than your health.

And that is your inclusion in his people. Your inclusion in the covenant. because if we read these stories, this passage again carefully, we see that that's actually what all of these things are about.

[19:22] It's not first about physical healing of these people, it's about including them first and foremost. You know, we ask ourselves as we read this, why did Matthew choose these particular people?

Because Jesus healed lots of people. Why did Matthew choose these particular people, the leper, the centurion, and even Peter's mother-in-law? What did they have in common? Ask yourself. Well, what they had in common is that they were all in some way excluded.

Do you ever feel excluded? Do you know what it feels like to be excluded? Maybe at school, at break time, a bunch of kids are playing a game and they didn't ask you and you wish they had? How do you feel? You feel like you're missing out. You feel like you're not valued. You feel like you're excluded. Or maybe a bunch of your friends you know are having a dinner party, getting together for dinner and no one invited you.

How do you feel? It's not nice to feel excluded, is it? Well, I want you to imagine feeling like that all the time.

[20:35] every single moment of every single day you are excluded from everything. That's how this man with leprosy felt. That's his life. And the centurion, he was a man with power, but he was excluded from the heart and the life of the people of God in the land that he lived.

He was excluded from God's people. And that's why he said in verse 8, I'm not worthy. He knew he's not worthy. He knew that he wasn't worthy to be amongst God's people.

And you know, even Peter's mother-in-law, she wasn't excluded like the rest of them. She was Jewish, etc. But, in this moment, because of her fever, she was excluded from Jesus' visit.

The rabbi was coming. The rabbi who has just preached this amazing sermon on the mount is coming to our house. And it's that day she happens to fall sick. And she's excluded. She's not able to be involved.

All of these people in some way were excluded. Do you ever feel like any of them when it comes to God and His people? Do you ever feel like the centurion?

[21 : 50] That you're not worthy maybe to be here in church? That you're, maybe you feel excluded from the good religious people at church? That you're just not one of them?

You maybe feel like you don't fit in. You're not good enough. Do you ever feel like that? That you don't belong? Well I have news for you if you do.

None of us belong here. None of us are good. And secondly, Jesus came precisely to include you no matter who you are.

That's why Jesus came, to include you. Because notice in each case in this story, Jesus is not only concerned with healing these people, but including them. That's why even after he heals the man with leprosy and the man's going off, he said, whoa, wait a minute.

Then Jesus told him, verse 4, see that you don't tell anyone, but go show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded as a testimony to them. Jesus is referring to the law that was required of people with leprosy to be cleared before they could be reintegrated back into society.

[23 : 02] And that's Jesus' concern here, that this man gets included again, back into his community, back into the people of God. And that's why also we read about not just Peter's mother-in-law being healed, but her serving.

Did you notice that? It doesn't just say she was healed, but she was healed. Let's see what it says. Verse 15, the fever left her, then she got up and began to serve him.

It's highlighting that Jesus made it possible for her to be included again in what was happening in her home. And so what we realize when we read this passage carefully is that it's not just about physical healing.

These miracles are about bringing excluded people in. Okay, but what about the Gentile? Centurion? You know, his servant being healed didn't include him or his servant any more than he was included before.

He was still excluded, right? Really? Really? Well, actually, if we read carefully, we realize that this centurion gets a more incredible assurance of inclusion than any of them.

[24 : 15] Look again at verse 10 to 12. Hearing this, Jesus was amazed. This is after the centurion shows what he knows about Jesus. And Jesus said to those following him, Truly, I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with so great a faith.

I tell you that many will come from east and west to share in the banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

many will come to share in the great banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. What is Jesus talking about?

What is this great banquet? Well, this is a well-known Old Testament symbol. It was a symbolic way of talking about the land of blessing and the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to his people that he would bring them into a state and a land of blessing where they would have everything they needed and they would have joy.

And what better symbol to represent this covenant promise of God in the land of blessing than a good meal with friends? Because how good is having good food with people you enjoy?

[25 : 40] It's one of the most pleasant experiences of life, isn't it? things like how do you feel when work is done, the day is over, you get together with some friends and you have just really nice food and maybe a glass of wine and everything is just good in that moment.

You know that? You feel that? You've got all of God's gifts right there, all of the things he wants you to enjoy. People, good food, and you just feel good and it's just joyful.

Well, that is the symbol used in the Bible, this great banquet for God's ultimate plan for his covenant people in the future that he has planned, in the future of this world, a world where we exist in a state like that all the time in joy and peace and shalom and relationship that is good and enjoyable with everyone and we have abundance and we don't have to worry and we just have God's gift all the time accessible to us to enjoy.

That is the world that God has planned and it's symbolized by this great banquet and that is what the Jews looked forward to and endured all the problems of this world because they looked forward to that world to come, the land of blessing and yet Jesus spoils all of that here when he makes the shocking revelation that Gentiles are going to be there.

He says many will come from east and west to share the banquet and the even more shocking revelation that many Jews won't be there. But the sons of the kingdom, verse 12, the sons of the kingdom, he's referring to Israel, the Jews, will be thrown into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[27 : 37] and we actually see the, we see evidence of the fulfillment here of what Jesus said already in our world today.

There are, right now there are more people outside of Israel who believe in Israel's Messiah than they are inside Israel. Israel. And this does, just as an aside, this really does speak to the question of the place of modern Israel today which I know is a question on many people's, many Christians' minds especially with what's going on in the Middle East with Hamas and Iran and Lebanon and the conflicts there and Israel and we ask what does the Bible say and what is the place of Israel.

If you haven't listened to the sermon I preached after the October 7th massacre last year on Israel, please listen to it because we talk about that. But even still Christians are going, but aren't they the chosen people, right?

Israel. Israelis, aren't they God's chosen people? Haven't they always been? Isn't God on their side? God is on their side. He won't abandon them. God is always on the side of His covenant people Israel, right?

Well, let's see again what Jesus says about whose side God is on. I'm just going to read it. I tell you that many will come from east and west to share in the banquet with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[29 : 07] What does Jesus say about whose side God is on? Yeah. See, God is on the side, not of the Israelis, but God is on the side of those who trust and submit to His Son, Israel's Messiah.

And the Bible says that those people, wherever they are in the world, whether they come from east or west, are true Israel. They are the covenant people of God because faith in the Messiah and that alone is what will determine who will be at God's feast.

And the Bible is completely clear on that. It is faith alone in the Messiah who will determine what side of God you're on and what side God is on.

faith in the Messiah alone will determine whether you are at His feast or not. And modern Israel, sadly, by and large, are rebels who have rejected their King, the Messiah.

Now we pray, as Paul prays in Romans 11, that that does not stay the way it is today and that the nation of Israel as a whole will realize once more who their Messiah truly is and come to faith in Him.

[30 : 20] We pray that that would happen. But, until they do, they are excluded from the feast. But forget Israel.

The question is, do you have that faith in who Jesus is? Because that alone is what will include you amongst the people who God plans to ultimately heal one day and who God desperately wants to and deeply wants to heal.

and has a plan to bless and heal. Do you want to be included amongst those people? Well then, do you have faith in who Jesus really is?

Like these men did. Do you realize the deep and desperate need for Jesus in your life? So much so that you realize you cannot live your own way anymore.

will you stop living your own way and realize how much you need Jesus in your life and His unique power to restore you and your life in a way that you never can because of what He did when He was here.

[31 : 30] As Isaiah goes on to tell us, He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brings us peace was upon Him. And by His wounds we are healed.

when He died on the cross. Isaiah wrote about that 700 years before it happened. But it was a prophecy perfectly fulfilled because it was always part of God's plan that He would die on that cross to take the sins of His people, which is the root of all our diseases and the root of all our problems,

to take that away, to get right to the root cause so that He could ultimately heal us and ultimately bring us to that feast one day.

Do you trust in Him for that? Do you realize your need for Jesus in your life and His unique power to restore you in a way that you can't because that is saving faith.

That is the faith that saves and it is so precious. That faith, the Bible says, is the most important thing in your life if you have it.

And if you don't have it, it is the one thing you need. And it is what these men in this story had. The centurion, this man with leprosy, they had that kind of faith.

[32 : 47] They knew they needed this man and they knew he could do it. That is the faith that drew them to trust in Jesus. But I want you to notice something. They would never have arrived at that faith, that saving faith in Jesus, if they had first been sick.

If they hadn't been sick, if this man didn't have leprosy, if the centurion servant wasn't sick, they would never have met Jesus. They would never have come to Him.

They would never have had something to cause them to have this saving faith in Him. And so you see there is a connection between sickness and faith. You need one for the other in this world.

Their weakness, their sickness led them to trust in Jesus. It led to their saving faith. And arguably, with Peter's mother-in-law as well, it was her healing which led her to serve Jesus the way she did. And by God's grace, your weakness will do that too. Your sickness will do that too. Will lead you to trust in Jesus in a way that you wouldn't have if you weren't sick.

[34 : 07] Because that is what Jesus really wants. Faith in Him. God wants you to be healed. Make no mistake. We see that in this story.

But His first concern is your faith in His Son. And because we, by nature, are so proud and self-reliant, God will often have to use weaknesses and difficulties to bring us to that faith.

And not just to bring us to it, but to keep us there as we go on in our journey in this life. God will often have to use weakness and lovingly expose us to sickness to keep us clinging to Christ in absolute dependence.

Who we actually need more than healing right now. We need that faith and that thing that causes us to come to Him. You need that more than you need healing right now.

We all do. Because only that faith can secure you a place at His table and a future where you will ultimately be healed. And you will look back and go, I see now why I needed to go through that.

[35 : 24] And so if you are struggling right now, and you are wondering why God has not healed you, I want you to know from this passage, it is not that He doesn't want to.

He does. But it is also that He wants so much more for you. He wants you to be part of that great feast at His table one day, completely restored forever.

But to get you there, He may ordain difficulties and sickness for the sake of your faith. that will cause you to cling ever closer to Christ and perhaps experience His grace in ways that you never would have if you weren't sick.

And that's why the apostles who, man, they suffered. These apostles we read about in the New Testament, they suffered more than most of us will in our life. And they can still say, we rejoice in our weaknesses.

We rejoice in our hardships. And that is why Peter, you know, Peter who was right there in these stories, right next to Jesus, at these healings, and he saw that, and he saw his mother-in-law healed, and he saw these people healed, he could still say in his letter to the churches, 1 Peter chapter 1, he says this, there is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while.

[36 : 52] These trials will show that your faith is genuine, it is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold, though your faith is far more precious than mere gold.

So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.

God wants to heal you, but more than that, he wants to include you on that great day. And so do what these men did, let your weakness drive you straight to him, in complete dependence on the one person who you know can fully heal you and who wants to, so ask him to, but if he doesn't right away, realize that it's because he wants so much more for you than you can know.

And so trust him. Trust this man. Let's pray. Oh Lord, we thank you that you revealed your heart in Jesus, that you are a God of deep compassion, who wants more good for us than we can know.

But Lord, we also know that it is only through faith in your son that that good can come. That's the only way our sins can be dealt with. And Lord, we pray that you would cause us to trust in him ever more and that even our weaknesses and sicknesses you would use to grow and deepen our faith in him as we look forward to that day to come when we will be ultimately healed.

[38 : 44] In Jesus' name. Amen.