

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC CHAPLAINS

The Healing Ministry of Jesus

November, 2012 Audio Conferences

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Objectives:

1. To place the healing ministry of Jesus within its original context
2. To examine how Jesus compares with the great “healers” of his tradition as found in the Old Testament
3. To examine Jesus’ healing ministry with the healings of other religious figures of the ancient world
4. To identify and examine the features of Jesus’ healing ministry
5. To compare and contrast the healing ministry of Jesus with contemporary expectations of healing
6. To explore how the healing ministry of Jesus continues in the healing ministry of the Christian church

Abstract:

While we Christians often associate Jesus with miraculous healings, what exactly do we imagine? Whom did Jesus heal and why? Can we say what really happened? And was Jesus really that unique, or was he one of many who “healed” as a sign of his authority as a religious leader. And ultimately, what does any of that have to say about the healing ministry of Christians in the 21st century? These and other questions will guide this investigation into the healing ministry of Jesus.

SESSION I – November 8, 2012

I. Healing Miracles and the Modern Mind

- A. There is no easy correspondence between the understandings of sickness that prevailed in the ancient world and our contemporary understandings
 1. Everything is the will of the gods? / Everything is due to understandable, rational causes?
- B. The need for clear terminology drawn from the insights of cultural anthropology: Pilch, Malina and Neyrey
- C. A definition of general concepts (drawn from “Healing” in **Handbook of Biblical Social Values**)
 1. **Sickness:** is defined in its broadest terms as “real misfortune in the realm of human wellbeing.”
 2. **Disease:** is a modern concept that “reflects the Western, scientific perspective”
 3. **Illness:** is another way to describe the pathological state, but it now serves as an umbrella term to “interpret misfortunes in human wellbeing beyond pathological states.”
 4. **Cure:** is “the elimination of a disease.”
 5. **Healing:** is “the restoration of meaning in life whether or not the disease is affected.”
 6. **Proper human wellbeing:** (“sometimes narrowly described as health) is a condition that allows a person to fully participate in cultural activities”
- D. Two different world-views regarding: human activity, relationships, time, humanity and the forces of nature, and human nature

II. Healing and healers in the biblical world

- A. Who heals? Great and holy religious leaders healed
- B. How do they heal? Mostly through intercessory prayer
- C. Whom do they heal? Individuals, animals, and societies
- D. What does such healing mean? The restoration of proper human wellbeing

III. Jesus the healer

A. What illnesses or conditions did Jesus heal?

1. **Exorcisms** entailed the action of driving out the source of illness.
2. **Healings** involve a wide range of vague illnesses that are difficult to categorize: the paralyzed and the crippled; the blind; leprosy; a catchall category of various physical ailments
3. **Raising from the dead** represents a radical reversal, restoring an individual from the extreme of the worst possible misfortune (death) to proper human well being

B. Which words were employed to describe Jesus' healing ministry?

1. In **exorcisms**, the focus of attention was placed on the unclean spirit (πνεῦματι ἁκάθαρτον), and words used included: rebuke, command, orders to remain silent and to come, taking the individual by the hand and lifting them up
2. When **healing those afflicted with paralysis or a withered limb**, Jesus directed his attention to the afflicted person, and used expressions such as: directing the person to walk, pick up a pallet and go home, to stretch out the hand, to be freed from infirmity, and he laid hands
3. When healing the **blind** he called them and entered into a conversation, asking what they wanted. Sometimes he touched their eyes, while in other instances he told them to “receive” their sight.
4. The healing of those described as “**lepers**” began with the leper(s) approaching Jesus and beseeching him. Jesus touched them and instructed them to show themselves to the priests.
5. The single distinct healings present a variety of situations with some familiar terms and actions
6. In general, Jesus' healing is far more active than the intercessory prayer of his contemporaries

C. Whom did Jesus heal?

1. Jesus healed those individuals whose **proper human wellbeing** had been compromised by some illness or condition that made them unfit and ineligible for public life.
2. Jesus' healing points to inadequate “medical” and “religious” structures
3. Jesus does not just heal a “disease,” but more importantly he heals the effects of illness by restoring the individual to **proper human wellbeing**

D. What was the collateral effect of Jesus' healings?

1. Very few of Jesus' healings involve an isolated individual
2. Jesus healed in public for two reasons.
3. First, Jesus' healing ministry was focused on the healing of the broadest reach of illness for the sake of the individual
4. Second, Jesus' healing ministry was also focused on the healing of the society

E. Breaking boundaries of purity / violating taboos

F. Why did Jesus heal?

1. It was what was expected of any great religious leader.
2. Jesus' ministry of healing was a manifestation of the Kingdom and a prophetic sign.
3. Jesus healed as a manifestation of his (God's) compassion!

SESSION II – November 15, 2012

- IV. Jesus' healing ministry: foreshadowed by the OT tradition
- A. Abraham: An example of intercessory prayer?
 - B. Moses: A healer of a leper?
 - C. Elijah and Elisha: God's warrior prophets
 - D. Luke 4:14-44: drawing from the prophetic vision of God's new creation
 1. Jesus' healing ministry appears to have flowed from the vision of the prophets, especially Isaiah and the Psalms
 2. It is especially in the writings of Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55) that this vision of God's compassion and vision for Israel (and the entirety of creation is found)
 3. This vision is found most powerfully expressed in the Songs of the Servant of the Lord
 4. The vision is expressed as a universal one in the image of God's holy mountain (Isa 65:17-25)
- V. Exorcism: driving out the source of illness
- A. An examination of the demoniac in the Synagogue at Capernaum (Mark 1:23-28 / Luke 4:33-37)
 1. Mark 1:23-28: *And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.*
 - B. Basic overview
 1. Location Synagogue (a public place of study and prayer)
 2. Who? – A man with an unclean spirit/unclean demon
 3. What? – The unclean spirit identifies Jesus' true identity (the Holy One of God)
 4. Jesus' action – Jesus rebukes, silences, and orders the spirit out of the man
 5. Spirit's response: it convulses the man / throws him down, and exits with a loud cry
 6. The result: the man is unharmed, the crowd amazed
 - C. Conclusions
 1. The exorcism occurs in a public setting
 2. Jesus addresses the evil spirit, not the man
 3. Our attention is a bit distracted by the "theological" identity issue
 4. Jesus' actions are consistent with other healers and exorcists
 5. In the end, the man has been restored to proper human wellbeing and the crowd is amazed
- VI. Healings: revisiting the illnesses Jesus healed
- A. The paralyzed and the crippled: an examination of the woman bent over (Luke 13:10-17)
 1. Luke 13:10-17: *Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your infirmity." And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she praised God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his ass from*

the manger, and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” As he said this, all his adversaries were put to shame; and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.

2. Basic overview of the pericope

- a. Location: Synagogue and a Sabbath
- b. Who? – a woman with a spirit of infirmity that has afflicted her for 18 years, with the result that she is not able to stand up straight
- c. What happens to prompt the healing? – Jesus sees her and calls her over
- d. Jesus’ action: he declares her free from her infirmity and then laid his hands on her
- e. The result: The woman is made straight and praises God

3. Conclusions

- a. Synagogue and Sabbath are appropriate for “untying”
- b. The woman is freed from her bond and is straightened up
- c. The woman is capable of praising God
- d. The adversaries are shamed
- e. The people glorify God over all that Jesus has done

B. The blind: An examination of Blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52)

1. Mark 10:46-52: *And they came to Jericho; and as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; rise, he is calling you.” And throwing off his mantle he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Master, let me receive my sight.” And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.*

4. Basic overview of the pericope

- a. Location: On the road from Jericho to Jerusalem
- b. Who: Bartimaeus, who is blind and has been forced to beg.
- c. What happens to prompt the healing? –Bartimaeus cries out for mercy
- d. Jesus’ action – Jesus calls him over
- e. The result:
 - i. Bartimaeus receives his sight, glorifies God and follows Jesus
 - ii. The people give praise to God
 - iii. No further mention of the disciples

5. Conclusions

- a. The public nature of this healing is emphasized
- b. Bartimaeus, the model disciple
- c. The crowd glorifies God
- d. The role of “faith”
- e. A “new” disciple on the scene?

C. Lepers: An examination of the healing of the 10 lepers (Luke 17:11-19)

1. Luke 17:11-19: *On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” When he saw them he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then said Jesus, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return*

and give praise to God except this foreigner?” And he said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”

2. Basic overview of the pericope

- a. Location: The outskirts of the village
- b. Who: Ten lepers
- c. What happens to prompt the healing? – They cry out: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us”
- d. Jesus’ response: Jesus sees them and instructs them to go and show themselves to the priests
- e. The result – They are cleansed and one of them turns back, praises God, and falls at Jesus’ feet

3. Conclusions:

- a. A consciousness of the public nature of the healing
- b. Show yourselves to the priests = proper human wellbeing
- c. The tenth leper is singled out for a reason
- d. Faith plays a central role

D. Various other healings: An examination of the healing of the woman with a blood flow (Mark 5:24-34)

1. Mark 5:24b-34: *And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. And there was a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard the reports about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, “If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well.” And immediately the hemorrhage ceased; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone forth from him, immediately turned about in the crowd, and said, “Who touched my garments?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’” And he looked around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had been done to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease”*

4. Basic overview of the pericope

- a. Location: A great crowd
- b. Who – a woman who had suffered from a flow of blood / hemorrhage for twelve years
- c. What happens to prompt the healing? – The woman take the initiative secretly
- d. Jesus’ response – To wheel around in the crowd
- e. The results
 - i. The woman is healed from her infirmity and restored to a state of proper human wellbeing
 - ii. The woman’s honesty and her recognition of Jesus’ power is contrasted with the disciples’ failure to understand

5. Conclusions

- a. The public nature of the healing plays a role
- b. The woman is set on the path of proper human wellbeing
- c. It is her “faith” that has brought about her healing
- d. Her faith and her initiative is contrasted with the lack of understanding on the part of the disciples

VII. The ultimate healing: raising the dead to life

A. General comments on raising from the dead

1. Many of the ancients told stories that included accounts of the raising from the dead.
2. More plausible due to multiple sources
3. How does this action fit into Jesus' overall healing ministry?

B. Raising the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:21-43)

1. Mark 5:21-24a; 35-43 – *And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him; and he was beside the sea. Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and seeing him, he fell at his feet, and besought him, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." And he went with him... While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" But ignoring what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. When they came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, he saw a tumult, and people weeping and wailing loudly. And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a tumult and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi"; which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." And immediately the girl got up and walked (she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.*

2. Basic overview of the pericope

- a. Location: A public setting
- b. Who – A little girl, twelve years of age
- c. What happened to prompt the healing? – The initial response to the situation comes because of the father's request
- d. Jesus' response: Jesus calls for "faith." He takes the girl by the hand and calls out to her to arise.
- e. The result:
 - i. The girl is restored to the life she knew
 - ii. Those who witness have abandoned fear and "believe"

3. Conclusions

- a. A public context and the result of faith
- b. Faith is asked of the parents, not the dead child
- c. The goal is to restore the child to proper human wellbeing
- d. The ultimate reversal from the state of ritual impurity

C. Raising the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17)

1. Luke 7:11-17: *Soon afterward he went to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." And he came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us! And "God has visited his people!" And this report concerning him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.*

2. Some random thoughts
 - a. Public setting
 - b. The vulnerability of a childless widow
 - c. Jesus' "compassion"
 - d. The voice of the widow's condition and the voice of her community
 - e. Jesus gives the son to his mother, thus restoring both to proper human wellbeing
 - f. Jesus heals the public setting

D. Raising Lazarus (John 11:1-45)

1. John 11:33-44 – *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; and he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept... Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days. Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you hear me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that you did send me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."*

2. Random thoughts

- a. A very public scene
- b. A mix of theological reflection and response from compassion
- c. The role of "belief"
- d. A most explicit purpose
- e. "Healing" Lazarus entails removing the bindings of death

VIII. Conclusions regarding Jesus' healing ministry

- A. Jesus' healings flowed from his message of the Kingdom of God
- B. Jesus did not just intercede through prayer, his healing ministry was filled with action and physicality
- C. Jesus mostly healed as the result of faith on the part of the one who sought to be healed, or sought healing on behalf of another
- D. Jesus' healing did more than simply eliminate illness; it restored the individual to a state of proper human wellbeing
- E. Jesus healing extended to the larger context of the community, with a special emphasis on worship (glorifying God)
- F. Jesus rarely healed in private contexts, emphasizing the proper communal nature of healing

IX. The healing ministry of the Christian Church as an extension of Jesus' ministry

- A. Jesus sent out his disciples to prepare the way
- B. A gift – charism – the ministry of healing (1 Cor 12:9,28,30; Gal 3:5; Rom 15:19)
- C. James 5:14-16

X. Lessons learned regarding Jesus' healing ministry

- A. Note the difference between the perceptions of illness as held by ancient societies and those held by modern societies
- B. Take account of how the "sick" are perceived by others and how they perceive themselves
- C. Focus on the broader context
- D. Rituals and circumstances that engage the public nature of healing can emphasize the interconnection and "heal" both parties
- E. The instruction of the disciples in Jesus' ministry to the sick ("neither this man sinned, nor did his parents") reminds us of the constant need for catechesis among the faithful
- F. Jesus' healing ministry constantly ran up against societal boundaries and taboos. Christian ministry today will likely run up against modern boundaries and taboos
- G. Jesus engaged in a ministry of healing because he was compassionate, because it gave witness to the Kingdom, and because the "faith" of the sick and their companions demanded it. Christian ministry needs to be rooted in the same kind of motivation and reason for being.
- H. Jesus' healing ministry was about achieving proper human wellbeing, and not just a "cure" from disease.