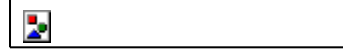


A Look at Healing

The Holy Spirit Today

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Well, you've arrived on a very good day, in my estimation, to be under the sound of God's word today. We come to a very vital, a very relevant topic in our series that we've titled "The Holy Spirit Today." And for those of you that are visiting with us, we have been in this series for a number of weeks, maybe five weeks or so, and I had in mind that I would do maybe one more message to deal with the matters of tongues and prophesy and healing, and as I prepared that, I realized that was too much for one message and it turned into two, and then I realized it's too much for two and it turned into four, and now it's standing at five and counting here in terms of what we have left to do. I would prefer to be a little bit more concise in it, I suppose, but I want you to understand something from the start and it's my judgment that others could disagree with that we need to take our time going through these matters. What we are going to say is contrary to the prevailing spirit in what professes to be the Christian church today, broadly speaking, and we need to be aware of that and not treat it superficially as though there weren't profound answers in support for the things that we are saying. But even more and today we're taking a look at healing, a look at biblical healing, miraculous healing today, however you want to title that, I'm mindful of this and as I was wrestling with how am I going to put this material together, how am I going to present it, what do I want to say, something started to emerge on my understanding that really kind of controlled the approach that I wanted to take and we're going to look at this topic today and next week also.

First of all, I'm very mindful that as you interact with people in the world and as you interact with people from other churches, the prevailing sentiment will be contrary to what the position is of Truth Community Church and so I want to help you be prepared for those things and those interactions for your own sake and that you might be in a position to help and to minister to those that the Lord brings into your path to minister to. But beyond that also, I'm very mindful that this topic of suffering in this world is very profound and comes to the very core of the way that we live and exist, and that goes beyond the normal, so-called normal manner of men in the manner of health and all of that, is that sooner or later we're going to deal with profound health issues in our lives and some of you are dealing with them now. You know, we have friends with cerebral palsy, you have issues of multiple sclerosis and dementia and terminal cancer and ill children and things like that, and our hearts cry out in that time and we need answers that are meaningful; we need things that we can lay hold of and grasp hold of and say what is our hope in the midst of this. You know, it's very easy, it's very easy to make an awful lot

of money by promising people physical healing in the realm today. It's an entirely different matter to, as we'll see, it's an entirely different matter to actually do what Scripture describes Jesus and the apostles doing and we'll address that here in a moment. But all of that just to give you a sense as I've worked through these issues and trying to prepare them in a way that is relatively concise and important and all of that, is that those pastoral issues started to rise to the front of my mind in terms of how we understand these things, yes, but how we interact with those around us from charismatic churches that see things differently, and also just the pastoral needs of those dealing with profound issues of health that are affecting and even taking away life from them. This deserves a serious treatment. This deserves an earnest treatment from God's word, not something flippant, not something passing, not something incidental because these things go to the very nature of our existence here on earth in many many ways.

By way of quick review on this topic of the Holy Spirit today, we started out and we saw the biblical work of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of sinners and in the sanctification of the saints. We spent a couple of messages looking at seven different aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit there and it was very important for us to see and to start with that so that there was a clear foundation of understanding, of assertion of doctrine saying we believe in the Holy Spirit and we believe in the work of the Holy Spirit because the accusation is made against that hold what we believe is that you don't even believe in the Holy Spirit. Well, that's a false accusation. That's a straw man. That's not true and we explained what we believe about the work of the Holy Spirit in that.

Then we shifted to talk about the nature of signs and wonders and we spent three weeks talking about the important foundational role of the apostles of Jesus Christ; that signs and wonders were not simply indiscriminately practiced to relieve everyone from all of their suffering while the apostles and Jesus were on the earth, but rather they had a limited purpose, they had a particular purpose in the unfolding of God's plan of redemption. They were an incidental means, incidental in one sense, they were not the end in themselves, the purpose of the signs and wonders attending the work of the prophets, of Jesus himself, and of the apostles, was to attest to the fact that what they were speaking was true revelation from God; things that were supernatural broke into the natural realm in order to verify a message about spiritual things, about invisible things, and the visible attestation of miracles certified the truth of what was being said. So we need to understand and we spent three weeks developing that, understanding that the apostles themselves were unique. There are no apostles today. The work of the apostles was unique, that work is not the same today and to realize the role that signs and wonders played in attesting to their ministry. You can find those messages, they are easily available online at our website.

So we've been building toward what we're starting today in introducing four more messages than I had originally planned dealing with this question, wanting to answer this question: is the Holy Spirit giving the gifts of tongues, prophesies, or miraculous signs to believers, to individual believers today? The framing of that question is very important. Is the Holy Spirit giving the gifts of tongues, prophesy or miraculous signs to individual

believers today so that they can practice these things indiscriminately according to their own will?

Well, there are two views in answer to that question. We'll develop this more as the weeks go by. The doctrine of cessationism says that those gifts have ceased. Cessationism, ceased, it's over, it's not happening anymore. Cessationism says that the Holy Spirit no longer bestows miraculous spiritual gifts in the present age to individual believers. In other words, this position says that the miraculous gifts have ceased. They were limited to the apostles who practiced them in order to verify the revelation that God was giving through them. The signs had a purpose, that purpose has been served, now that the purpose is over, the canon of Scripture is complete, the apostles are gone, that which attended their work has ceased. Cessationism. The other view you could say on this is called continuationism. Continuationism, and by contrast those who hold to this position would teach that at least some of the miraculous gifts described in the Bible continue to be given to the church even today, and so this position says the miraculous gifts continue today. Cessationism, it stopped. Continuationism, it says that it's continued. Just trying to define a couple of terms for you.

Now, let me just state plainly without qualification, without hesitation, that Truth Community Church holds to the cessationist position. We are a cessationist church and we're going to explain that as we go along. I just want to be clear and up front with you about those things.

Now when we talk about miraculous gifts, here's what we mean by a miracle, and it's surprisingly important to define the term "miracle" so that you know exactly what's being said because the term is used far too loosely today. Things are described as miracles that can be explained by very natural means and the word is used in a loose sense that is not at all helpful for understanding what Scripture is teaching on these important issues. By a miracle, I'm just defining terms here and then we'll get into Scripture in just a moment, by a miracle we mean a manifestation of the power of God in the visible realm that authenticates divine revelation. It is a manifestation of the power of God in the invisible realm that can be seen with the senses and verified by multiple witnesses. That's an oversimplification but what I want to emphasize to you today is when we're using the term "miracles," we're talking about that which is visible. We are not asking whether God heals sick people in answer to prayer. We believe that he does. We believe that he does that according to his will. What we will also see later on is that sometimes healing is not God's will. Contrary to what prominent charismatic teachers will say is that it's always God's will to heal you and if you're not healed, you're the problem, it's your lack of faith, God's not the problem, so in addition to the physical suffering that these dear friends are going through, it is heaped upon them spiritual guilt that the reason they don't receive their healing is because there is something wrong with them, something lacking in their faith. The perversity of that deserves great condemnation and one day these men will be held to an account by a holy God. But we're not asking whether God heals in answer to prayer, sometimes he does. My own beloved mother was diagnosed with Stage IV cancer 6 ½ years ago and the doctor indicating very clearly that, "You shouldn't expect her to live more than six months." Well, it's 6 ½ years after praying for my mother, the cancer is

gone, she is in the best health that she's been in in the past 20 years or more, and we rejoice and we thank God for the physical healing that he brought to my mother, but I didn't heal her. It wasn't a miraculous visible miracle where somebody came and laid hands on her and it disappeared. It's not like that, it wasn't like that. God did a work on my mother and delivered her from that cancer but it was not a miraculous healing in the sense that we're talking about here today.

So I mention that just to give you a sense of clarity of what we're talking about here. We pray for people to be healed, yes, but we pray so with a sense of, "Father, not my will but thine be done"; that God will answer that prayer according to his wisdom, according to his will, and so we bring that submissively not to command a healing with this regard to what God would do with it. So that's all by way of introduction. The question is what do we think about the idea of healing by individuals holding that gift today? What are we to make of the so-called faith healers today? What are we to make of them? And I'll try to restrain myself and not display all of the anger that I feel toward them in what I have to say to you today.

Here's what we want to do. I want to look at this in three steps here today. First of all, I want to look at the nature of biblical healing, just to touch on that. Then secondly, to look at the limitations of biblical healing. You know, what do we find as we read Scripture, not just a few cherry-picked texts that questionably could support the idea of healing, what does the Bible say about its own people in biblical history and their illnesses and the practice of signs. Then thirdly, and this part will be very critical, the present danger of a fascination with signs. The present danger of a fascination with signs. So that's what we're going to cover here today and that will be more than enough to keep us occupied for the next 45 minutes or so.

Let's take a look, first of all, at the nature of biblical healing remembering that we defined a miracle as that which is done in the visible realm, okay? That which is done in the visible realm. A manifestation of the power of God that has no other explanation. What's the nature of biblical healing. Turn to the Gospel of Mark 3 and I'm only going to look at a couple of examples here just to make the point to help us make a contrast with what happens today in the realm of so-called healings. In Mark 3, beginning in verse 1, it says that Jesus... Mark 3:1, I'll give you an extra second to get there. In Mark 3:1, it says that Jesus "entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered." His hand was lame; it was crippled. And in verse 2, "They were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. He said to the man with the withered hand, 'Get up and come forward!' And He said to them, 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?' But they kept silent." And what did Jesus do, then? In verse 5, he said, "After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored." Beloved, this was a visible manifestation of the power of God in the presence of witnesses in an uncontrolled environment. Jesus spoke to the man whose hand was visibly withered, that everyone could see, they were looking to see what Jesus was going to do because they could see that his hand was withered. It was visible to all and Jesus by his spoken word said, "Stretch our your hand,"

and from the gnarly contorted nature of his hand, whatever that looked like at the time, he stretched it out and his hand was restored to full use instantly, immediately, fully in the presence of witnesses who could verify it with what they saw with their own physical senses.

In a similar manner addressing different limbs of the body, look at Acts 3. Mark 3, Acts 3. And as you know from reading the Scriptures for yourself, we could multiply examples from the ministry of Jesus, from the ministry of the apostles; we're just using two to set the stage. We're not at all trying to be comprehensive in anything that we say here. In Acts 3:1, "Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb," do you see that? He was lame from his mother's womb, from birth, in a way that was visible and obvious to all and known to everyone. This wasn't a secret. This wasn't somebody brought in off the street who had been screened by handlers of the apostles before he ever got to them to make sure that something would not go wrong. No, it wasn't like that. "A man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple." This man was publicly known, had been publicly observed over a period of many many years since his birth and people saw him, they knew him. This was evident. This was established public fact that this man was born lame and could not walk. Verse 3, "When he saw Peter and John," these are the apostles after the resurrection, after Jesus' ascension, after the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the apostles who were appointed by Jesus and who were going to be the vessels of his revelation to mankind, they were "about to go into the temple," verse 3, "he began asking to receive alms. But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, 'Look at us!' And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them." He got more than he was expecting. Verse 6, "Peter said, 'I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene--walk!' And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately," notice that, "immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God; and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him."

Beloved, do you see it? This man could not walk and he was lame from birth. He never walked. Everybody knew that. Everybody had seen that and by the spoken word of the apostles, they commanded him, "You stand up and walk," and immediately he stood up and walked in the presence of many witnesses in a way that was utterly undeniable. They could not deny that he had been lame from birth because they had known that all of their lives, and what happened in front of them also could not be denied. That selfsame man in a moment at the word of the command of the apostles, suddenly had an ability that he had never had before. Visibly, verifiable by multiple witnesses.

So what we see from those two examples is that the biblical gift of healing produced immediate, complete and undeniable recovery by the spoken word of the healer of visible

things dealing with human limbs in the two examples that we chose. Now beloved, today's so-called faith healers are not doing anything like that which tells you that whatever they're doing is not the biblical gift practiced by Jesus and the apostles. What do today's so-called faith healers do when they stop asking for money long enough to do it? They specialize in invisible ailments like headaches or back pains or internal matters that are not subject to visible proof. They screen people before they ever get up to the platform. They never allow visibly deformed and crippled people, I'm using that word "crippled," I realize that may not be politically correct now but I don't mean it in anything other than a descriptive way. They never let people like that up. When they encounter them, they are never able to command a limb to straighten out so that a man who was like this suddenly has the full use of his arm and to do it in an uncontrolled environment, that they do not have complete control over. What do they do? They work in closed environments that they control with lights and music and emotional manipulation and group dynamics where they build up a sense of expectation through artificial means and then call people forward and start waving their hand over them and with handlers that are behind people so that they fall down and they don't hurt themselves, supposedly a manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit. Are you kidding me? Are you kidding me? First of all, there's nothing like that in Scripture. There are no commands of anything like that to do ministry like that in Scripture, but think about this, you're supposedly under the power of the Holy Spirit but you've got to have somebody behind them to catch them? What, the Spirit can't lower them down gently so that they don't suffer a concussion when they hit their head?

Beloved, I've said this multiple times but it's fitting to say it again. These things are undeniable. None of them, none of them go to children's hospitals and empty the wards. None of them, none of them go to families that are suffering looking at their loved ones on their deathbed and raise that person up to physical life and send them home restored to health. They don't do that and, beloved, let me tell you something, if they could do it, they would do it. Do you know why? Because look at the fortune that they make with the cheap imitation. If they could do the real thing, think of the exponentially even greater fortune that they could make if they could do the real thing live on camera and bring forth people that are known to be permanently handicapped. No. No. No, the difference between the biblical gift of healing and what is practiced today is undeniable and I want to tell you that God established that distinction so that there would be a clear demarcation between the truth of his word, the truth revealed through the apostles, and to make it possible for us to distinguish the counterfeit that is offered in its place today. They do not do it because they cannot do it and if they could do it, they would do it because they would make even greater fortunes.

So instead, they practice counterfeits in the name of Christ. People say, "Well, do these people know that they're deceiving?" The answer to that question in one sense doesn't matter, beloved. Whether they are actively deceiving or they are practicing deception, our point for today is to recognize the distinction between what Scripture describes and what happens today. Now I realize that they'll make these unverifiable hearsay claims, "Well, you should hear what's going on in Tanzania. Or you should hear what's going on in other places. My third cousin by marriage told me about something that his brother-in-law

saw," as if that's some kind of refutation of the point. No, go into an environment that you don't control, do a visible miracle on somebody that is known publicly to suffer in this way without music, without lights, without asking for money, and then maybe we can talk. But that's never going to happen because they don't have the biblical gift of healing. As we said, we believe that God can and does heal today but that he does so by his will often in response to prayer, rather than giving the gift of healing to a particular man who is able to exercise that at his unfettered discretion. The distinction between those two is vast.

So we do not accept the claims of these charismatic teachers to have the gift of biblical healing. We just look at the facts as say, "You are not doing what Scripture describes here. Maybe you are redefining terms and saying that we are doing healing but by healing we mean these invisible things in this environment, but that's not the biblical gift. That's not the biblical healing that we see described that was so miraculous that it was utterly undeniable by everybody who saw them and produced amazement and permanent immediate healing. If I read one more account of somebody who was supposedly healed but it came back five days later, I'm really going to lose my composure because this is a counterfeit. This is not biblical. This is something else.

You say, "Well, what are we to make of these things?" Well, let's just say just very briefly there is great great power in the power of suggestion to desperate people. Why is there a documented, known term called placebo effect? People receive something that has no medicinal qualities to it whatever but it seems to make them better, why is that when they take the pill that it makes them better? It's because the mere suggestion worked on their mind and helped them but there was nothing chemical about the treatment or anything like that that produced a result. It was a sugar pill or whatever. And in like manner, we should not underestimate the power of suggestion and the fact that looking at it from the other way, I finally got my mind to kick in on what I was trying to talk about, a placebo effect producing change just by the power of suggestion, well, we all know the term psychosomatic illness. People have a sense of being ill that's just generated by their mind and so we should not underestimate the power of the mind to generate things that produce changes in headaches or pains or things like that.

So there is a lot of power of suggestion, of group dynamics going on in these mass meetings that Benny Hinn and other charlatans conduct. I saw recently an account of a son who was severely disabled, confined to a wheelchair, limbs contorted, and she just followed the Benny Hinn crusades around driving this disabled son thousands of miles to just go from event to event. Tragic. Sad. And it's incidents like that that make this so vital for us to deal honestly with; to not be gullible. This is a little bit of a crass way to put it but it communicates and that's what I'm trying to do today, you know, the message on these things as we look around and we see this happening around us, the message for us is don't be a sucker. Don't be a sucker. Don't be gullible. Look at Scripture. See what Scripture describes and ask the question, "Is that happening today? Are these kinds of visible healings of people born with distorted limbs, of people born blind, are they being healed?" And the answer becomes evident in itself.

Now, enough of that. Some people say that it is always God's will for you to be healed. You've probably heard that. I've heard that and that, you know, God wants you to be healthy and to be healed, and so that if you're sick, if you're ill, then there's just a miracle waiting for you, there's just opportunity, that's not God's design for you. Is that true according to Scripture? And the answer is no, that's not true at all. That is not true at all. It's not true to Scripture. It's not true to experience. It's not even true to the experience of those who made a fortune in faith healing, as we will see.

Let's look just a little bit at the limitations of biblical healing, then, point 2. We saw the nature of biblical healing, point 1. Point 2: the limitation of biblical healing. And I understand and I freely acknowledge that in what we're doing here today, that we're not at all being exhaustive of every point that could be made of every argument that could be raised against what I'm saying; we're trying to put foundational things in place to give us firm solid reference points to deal with matters and to deal with other questions that might come up at another time. Secondly, let's look at the limitation on biblical healing.

First of all, what we find is that the Apostle Paul himself suffered a bodily illness during his own ministry. Look at Galatians 4. In Galatians 4:12, Paul says, "I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong; but," look at this in verse 13, "but you know that it was because of a bodily illness," weakness of the flesh it could literally be translated, "it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself." Here is the Apostle Paul describing a bodily infirmity that was attending him, that was with him that was afflicting him even in the midst of his ministry. If anybody would have had the faith to receive healing in that condition, it would have been the Apostle Paul, wouldn't it? And yet he went on, he did his ministry suffering from the bodily affliction without any hint of suggestion here that that bodily illness was contrary to the will of God for his life. This was just part of what happened in the early years of his ministry.

As you go on and as you read Paul's letters, you'll find that Paul did not perform healings even on close associates in his ministry. He did not perform healings on close associates in his ministry without exception. Look at 1 Timothy 5:23 as he gives what some would consider to be by modern standards, most unspiritual earthly advice. In 1 Timothy 5:23 he says, "No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments." Now how could it be if it is always God's will for a man to be healed and that it's somehow sinful if you're not healed, how could Paul give such standard ordinary advice, "Take wine and its medicinal purposes for your stomach because, Timothy, I know you have frequent ailments. This is a pattern of life for you, Timothy." Well, if this was an indication of sin, Paul should have been rebuking him for his sin and calling him to faith and repentance. He doesn't do anything like that. He says, "Timothy," in effect, "take a little medicine for your stomach so that you'll feel better and be able to do what you need to do." That's so ordinary. Well, yeah. You see, it seems ordinary to us only when we view it from the false and mistaken presuppositions of the charismatic movement that would tell people that, "You should never be sick. You should

always be healed. You know, your healing is just waiting for you. You're right on the verge of it if you'll just have enough faith." I love the way they always place conditions on it, conditions on the sick people so that they've always got an out. "Well, you know, you could've had healing but you just didn't have enough faith." In my flesh I wish for the return of Jesus bodily just long enough to go into places like that and for a third time overturn tables in rejection of those abominations and the cruel spiritual affliction that it puts on people who are suffering through no sin of their own.

In 2 Timothy 4:20, these verses that we sometimes consider to be so incidental, "Why is that in Scripture," even, and then you start to realize, "There's something important here that's embedded in the word." 2 Timothy 4:20, "Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus." Paul you left him sick? I thought it was God's will for everyone to be healed? Why didn't you just say the word and heal him? Why didn't you just make him better so that he could join you in ministry? Well, it's because there was a limitation on the biblical healings. They were not indiscriminately practiced. It obviously wasn't always God's will for everybody to be healed instantly from every affliction that they ever came so that we just simply lived in the midst of utter, complete, perfect health indefinitely forever and ever, amen.

Now, going further, expanding out a little bit to talk about signs a little bit more broadly speaking. Even in the words of Jesus, the ministry of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, the signs were not indiscriminately practiced in biblical days and Jesus made a point of pointing that out. Look at Matthew 12. We're building a collective case and we're not even into the total fullness of it yet. Matthew 12:38, "some of the scribes and Pharisees said to [Jesus], 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.' But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet.'" You want a sign? The answer is no. I'm not giving it to you. Now how can you explain that if the idea is that we just have healing on demand whenever we have enough faith? It's nonsense. It's a wicked distortion of Scripture that leads to even greater deception, as we'll see in a few more moments.

Look at the Gospel of Luke 4. Luke 4:25. Actually, let's go back and start in verse 23. Luke 4:23, "[Jesus] said to them, 'No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, "Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.'" And He said, 'Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. But I say to you,' verse 25, "'I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.'" Here was pressing need distributed throughout the land because famine had fallen on the land three years and six months, and there is a prophet of God and Jesus says he only got sent to one. Not to everyone indiscriminately. Somehow it was God's will in the outworking of his purposes for his nation at that time, for everyone save one to experience the onslaught and the difficulty and the suffering of that famine. You can't explain that with an attitude that says everybody should be healed; everybody should be healthy; everybody should be

prosperous. Jesus says it in his own words, points to biblical history and affirms it as the will of God to the contrary.

Now, we could look at other things. Should I remind you that God actually authorized affliction for his servant Job? Satan came and demanded permission, God gave him permission and said, "You go and afflict Job, just spare his life," and for 35 chapters of that 42 chapter book, 37 chapters, you find people wrestling with the suffering that Job was afflicted with, so much so that he lost 10 children, he lost his health, he lost his fortune. But let's bring it down and apply the vice to the faith healers today. Do I need to remind you that even the charismatic faith healers today age? Look at these older guys that have been doing the faith healing stuff for 30, 40, 50, 60 years. Look at the wrinkles in their face. Look at the evident process of aging that is taking hold on them. Why don't they reverse it? Why don't they command their sagging face to become fresh like a baby's bottom? Do you know why they don't do it? Oh, listen, it's not because they wouldn't, it's not because they don't want to. These vain men would love nothing more than to carry around the look of vigor that belongs to a 20 year old man. They don't do it because they can't. Why do some of them wear eyeglasses? You find pictures of Benny Hinn wearing eyeglasses, why not just wave your hand over yourself and heal your eyes so you have perfect 20/20 vision? Why don't you do that? It's because you can't. Why is it that you don't have faith healers from prior generations alive and with us today? Why don't you have faith healers that are 120, 140, 160 years old? Because they died, that's why. Well, why did they die? Apparently some disease took hold of them of some kind or another. Google the name of Kathryn Kuhlman or Smith Wigglesworth, Kenneth Hagin, or Oral Roberts, and you will find the location of where they are buried just after a short synopsis of their faith healing ministry. It's self-refuting. Indeed, Scripture says it is appointed for all men to die. They're all going to die and so sooner or later all of these promises of healing run out. You see it in the pages of Scripture that not everyone was healed; you see it in the pages of history today of these men who claimed to have the gift of healing that are now dead and buried. You wait around 5, 10, 20 years, there will be a lot more to add to that list because Scripture says and the Scriptures cannot be broken, that it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment. Just work it out to its logical end. Even if you did get healed today, something's going to take you tomorrow. Apparently there is some limitation on it even in their experience.

Look, what I'm about to say, I say knowing that there are people suffering in the room, grievously suffering from physical affliction and I say this to support you, to help you, to encourage you, to strengthen you in Christ as I make this polemic against those who would come and criticize your lack of faith. It is ignorant, no, it is cruel for these faith healers to tell people that God wills their healing. Scripture gives us no such promise. May we ask God for healing in the midst of our affliction in prayer? Yes, we may. Can we guarantee, can we promise it in advance? No, we may not. We pray to him with a sense of submission and dependence, "God, not my will but thine be done. God, help me in my affliction but nevertheless, not my will but thine be done." Whatever Paul's affliction was in 2 Corinthians 12, he asked three times for the Lord to take it away from him and three times the Lord said, "No." What are we to make of this? Are we suddenly men of greater faith than Paul? Was it Paul's failing? Was it Paul's lack of faith that the

Lord responded that way? No, quite to the contrary and what God said to Paul is the same thing, the same comforting words that he would breathe to those in the midst of dire affliction today, that he would speak to you even in the midst of your affliction now. Not a promise of earthly bodily healing immediately, but rather the promise, "My grace is sufficient for you. I'll perfect my power in your weakness." So we see the limitations on biblical healing from the life of Paul, from the life of those around him, in the words of Jesus. We see the limitations on it even in the realm of those who practice and proclaim these things.

Now thirdly, this gets even more compelling, even more compelling as I want to take just a few moments to talk about number 3, the present danger of miracles. The present danger. The danger of miracles. The danger of it. You see, what we're talking about here and what I want to impress upon your mind, beloved, is this, is that we are not talking about matters of incidental consequence, we're not talking about matters that what's true and what's false, what's right and wrong don't really matter here, that it's a difference of opinion and we can all get along and still claim the name of Christ. It's not like that. Scripture does not allow us to take that middling position that shows a lack of conviction or a lack of willingness to step out and say, "No, this is wrong. Not only is it wrong, it's dangerous." That's right, I said it's dangerous and I want to show you very quickly probably a half dozen, five or six passages that will make the point.

Now just by way of reminder, step back here for a little bit. Take a breath. I know I'm kind of animated. I'm worked up today. But just to remember that we've said as we looked at the apostles, we looked at their qualifications, we looked at the history of the sign gifts and we said that's not happening today, that belonged to a time for a period of new revelation but the apostles are gone and the signs that accompanied them are now also gone. What do we have instead? What we have instead is a completed canon, a complete Scripture, 66 books of the Bible which are perfectly sufficient because they come from God to answer every spiritual question that we need to have answered, that are sufficient to lead us to faith in Christ Jesus, and are sufficient to sanctify us in the truth for God's word is truth. We have instead of an age of signs and wonders, we have an age of Scripture and settled, established, fixed truth, is what we have. So it's not that God has left us as orphans, it's not that he's left us without help. He's given us the Scripture and as we saw earlier in this series on the Holy Spirit today, his Spirit, himself, indwells us as Christians. So God has given us something different, something equally powerful but in a different kind of realm than the signs and wonders. He has given us a sufficient book that we can read and study and go over again and again to make sure that we get it right and know that we've got the true word of God. He has given us his indwelling Spirit to guide us, to direct us. He operates all of the world according to his perfect providence so that whatever happens in our lives is somehow an outworking of the purpose of God in the macro realm and in the micro realm. So you have Scripture, you have the indwelling Spirit, you have the providence of God directing every aspect and detail of your life. You have the promise that his grace is sufficient for you. We're not beggars here. We've been given such a multiplicity of grace and gifts that we don't comprehend it. In this realm in which we have, Scripture pivots our understanding and our thinking and our estimation of

claims to signs and wonders and that's what we want to get to here in point 3 about the present danger of miracles.

First of all, let's ask this question: do signs help people to believe? Do they help people to genuinely believe? Well, Matthew 24:24, listen as I read, "false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect." Jesus says, "Behold, I have told you in advance." Whoa! Whoa! You mean to tell me that since the close of the canon, that we should view signs and wonders as a possibility of that which brings deception, not truth, to us? And Jesus says, "Well, I told you in advance. I warned you about this."

If that was the only verse, maybe I wouldn't even make the point but signs, the desire for signs – oh, it takes my breath away – the desire for signs and visible wonders now that Scripture is completed is contrasted with the true preaching of the cross. Look at 1 Corinthians 1 with me. Paul is describing his ministry, the word of the cross, and he says in verse 21, "since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." He appointed preaching that seems foolish to the world as being the instrument by which the Gospel is brought and souls are saved from sin.

He goes on in verse 22 and he says, "indeed Jews ask for," what? Answer me, what does it say? Jews are asking for signs. They wanted the same thing then that people want today. "Show us a sign." "Greeks search for wisdom," Paul says verse 23, "but," by contrast, "we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Do you know what? Born again believers like many of you in here, you don't need signs, you're not attracted to signs because you understand that in Christ crucified proclaimed from the Scriptures you have what you need; you have what God has truly given and it satisfies your soul to know that your sins are forgiven and you have a hope of an eternal life. All I want you to see here is that Paul contrasted his ministry of apostolic preaching of Christ with what the Jews wanted which was signs.

The Bible warns us against the coming antichrist. Look at 2 Thessalonians 2 and what we're starting to see here is that signs now that Scripture is completed, are not a reliable indication of the true God being at work. In fact, they are indications of deception. Now this passage is looking toward the end of time. 2 Thessalonians 2:9, Paul talking about the coming antichrist, he says, verse 9, "that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan." What's that going to be accompanied by? "All power and signs and false wonders." Oh, are you kidding me? "And with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness." The coming antichrist is going to be marked by miraculous signs, things that seem supernatural and people will follow saying, "Look at that! That's proof that this is a man to be followed," and Scripture says the exact opposite. That is a mark of delusion. That is a mark of not loving the truth that people hunger and hanker after that.

It's not a good sign, it's a danger sign with eternal consequence. I'm not trying to win an argument here, I'm pleading for the help of souls. These things lead people to deception to make them think that they are saved when they are not, and in the end they will go to hell shocked at the fact that the Lord did not receive them, and the common theme is signs and wonders today after the completion of the canon.

Two more passages, one that I already alluded to last week but let's just go here. I'll change sequence. Matthew 7, to just build on what I just said and to repeat what I've said earlier in the series, so just very briefly. This weighs very very heavily on my heart and if I could talk about these things in a disinterested monotone voice without warning and pleading with everyone who would hear my voice to take these things seriously, I would disqualify myself from ministry. Matthew 7:22, Jesus looking forward to the day of judgment, taking personal responsibility for what he is about to say, says, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness. Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.'" Oh beloved, don't you see it? Don't you see it? Jesus himself, our Lord and Master, our Teacher, says, "Let me tell you in advance what's going to happen on the day of judgment. Here's what's going to happen, people will stand before Me and base their expectations on their experience and practice of signs and wonders, prophesy and casting out demons," all kinds of spiritual warfare stuff and Jesus says, "It will be many," many, the colossal loss here is immeasurable and he's going to say, "People like that, I'm going to tell them, I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."

Do you remember the rich man who died and went to Hades? We won't turn there, it's in Luke 16. He was pleading with father Abraham, "Father, send Lazarus back from the dead. If they can hear him from the dead, they'll believe." Abraham said, "It's not going to do them any good. If they won't hear Moses, they won't listen if a man is raised from the dead." Do you see the common theme here? It is the word, it is the written word that is preached and proclaimed by which we see God revealed now. It is the word written and proclaimed that has the power to save souls and that in multiple places, multiple places, Scripture warns in unqualified language, "Don't go the route of signs and wonders. It is a path of deception that will lead people unknowingly into destruction. It leads them away from the word."

We're not living in the age of apostolic signs and wonders. The apostles are gone. The attesting signs, the real ones are gone as shown by the fact that they can't do them. They have to generate some counterfeit Mickey Mouse money in the economy of God. It doesn't buy anything. Today Scripture teaches that the pursuit of signs only invites deception with great eternal consequence as a result. The charismatic movement today, hundreds of millions of people, maybe a billion, I don't know what the current numbers are, the charismatic movement today is not healthy. It is a cause for grief and it grieves my heart to have to say that. We realize that there are some who are within the realm of that who don't know any better, who need to be taught, instructed, they'll come out of it if

they're genuinely saved, the word will lead them out of it. We're not talking about ordinary individual believers that are kind of sucked into that, what we're talking about is the movement, the theology that drives at the primary teachers that bring disciples around them and we would say this, we don't think much of the men and women who take advantage of sick and desperate people, making false promises to them in exchange for money. We don't think much of so-called people who proclaim to be Christians, who proclaim to be leaders who have big television shows with big poofy hair, male and female alike, who offer false promises of hope to parents with suffering children, who just desperately want their child to be well and to leverage their desperation to your financial gain against the word of God, their judgment will be just.

But that leaves us with a question as we close this morning. You're not going to like the fact that I'm closing with this, that I'm closing with it. That leaves a question as I worked my way all the way through it, that leaves a really important question, a fair question to be asked of a guy like me after you've said all these things: okay, what do we say to sick and desperate people? What do we say to those with irreversible conditions like cerebral palsy or dementia or terminal cancer, multiple sclerosis or a thousand others? What would we say to a weeping parent at the side of their child as they watch the life of that loved little one slip away? What would we say to them if we don't offer them promises of healing? What do we say to you when your healing doesn't come, and for some of you having suffered like the woman in the Gospels, having suffered at the hands of physicians for many a year? What would we say to you? We'll try to answer the question when the healing doesn't come, we'll answer that next week and I hope you can be with us.

Let's pray together.

Father, we've done our best in our faltering feeble efforts to try to be faithful to your word, to try to let your word speak to the spiritual realm in which we exist in the broader term. Father, we've tried to protect your sheep from deception. We've tried to help people recognize false hope so that they don't give their time or money in pursuit of it but ultimately, Father, we realize how grotesquely feeble our final efforts and our final words really are and we confess an utter dependence of need for the help of your Holy Spirit, the grace of your Holy Spirit to do a work of God in the hearts of the people of God in response to what has been said. Be merciful to us. Be gracious to us. In our profound weakness, Father of body, soul and spirit, our profound weakness of mind in these things, Father, manifest your sufficient grace.

I pray, Father, for those that are here and their bodily affliction is great, Father, and it is understandable and it calls forth our compassion when they cry out for relief and they feel the discouragement when the healing doesn't come. Father, to them who truly look to your word, to them who look truly to Christ, to them who look in utter dependence, to them who pray, "No my will but thine be done, O God," to them, O God, not following after false promises contrary to your word but to those truly looking to Christ, O God, may you perfect them, may you comfort them, may you confirm them, may you strengthen them, may you establish them against the adversary and strengthen them in a corresponding way greatly in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, your death, your resurrection, your love, your righteousness, your shed blood are all we need. It's the hope for eternal life that does not fail and we realize that while we may suffer affliction in this life, that what your atonement has purchased for us is a coming restoration, a coming perfection, not in this life but to be found with you in heaven, and the longings of our heart simply point us to the fulfillment that we still await. God, have mercy on such ones that are gathered with us in this room and be merciful to us all, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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