



JESUS' Healing MINISTRY

WHY IT MATTERED

By Cecil R. Taylor

IN THE LAST WEEK OF Jesus' life, "the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them" (Matt. 21:14).¹ Gospel reports of Jesus' healings take four forms. (1) *Stories*—A search of a Gospel harmony² turned up nineteen stories about the Lord's healings. (2) *Summaries*—At least eleven summaries appear, reporting times when groups of diseased people found Jesus and "he healed many/all" (e.g., Matt. 12:15; Mark 3:7-12). (3) *Sayings*—As an example, in reply to the messengers John the Baptist sent to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news" (Matt. 11:3,5). (4) *Statements*—Among Jesus' followers were "some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses" (Luke 8:2). If Jesus healed Mary Magdalene of "evil spirits," presumably He healed

Joanna and Susanna of "sicknesses."

Usually healing stories follow a fixed format.³ *Setting*—Sometimes details about circumstances and an audience would accompany a description of the sickness or personal need. *Cure*—Jesus' words and/or deeds healed or met the need. Events or circumstances confirmed the miracle. *Result*—Jesus healed as needed and bystanders recognized the miracle as the work of God (e.g., Mark 1:27; Luke 7:16).

Healings fall into five main categories. (1) Jesus healed four paralyzed and crippled people (Matt. 8:5-13; Mark 2:1-12; 3:1-6; John 5:1-9). (2) Three blind men received their sight from Him (Mark 8:22-26; 10:46-52; John 9:1-41). (3) Jesus cleansed lepers on two occasions (Mark 1:40-45; Luke 17:11-19). (4) He raised three persons from the dead: a little girl was dead for a short time (Mark 5:21-43); a widow's son who was dead likely less than a day (Luke 7:11-17); and Lazarus who was dead for four days (John 11:1-44). (5) The Gospels have a "grab bag" of healings that they mention only once. These include Jesus' healing: Peter's mother-in-law with a fever (Mark 1:29-31); the bleeding woman (5:24-34); the deaf-mute (7:31-37); the centurion's servant (Matt. 8:5-13);

the man with edema or *hydropikos* (Luke 14:1-6); and the ear of Malchus (22:49-51). In view of the summaries already mentioned, these are only examples of Jesus' healings.

By what means did Jesus heal? In some instances Jesus touched the ill person (e.g., Matt. 9:29-30). In others, He merely spoke (e.g., Mark 5:41-42). At times Jesus both touched the person and spoke (e.g., 7:33-35). Near Nain He raised a widow's son from the dead by touching the lad's bier and speaking (Luke 7:14-15). On another occasion a bleeding woman, in likely an act of both faith and desperation, touched Jesus' garment (Mark 5:27-28). Jesus prayed before raising Lazarus (John 11:41-42) and, if His "sigh" before the deaf mute (Mark 7:34) was a prayer, this was the method once more. Three times He used spittle, or clay made from spittle (Mark 7:31-37; 8:22-26; John 9:1-7).

Where did Jesus heal? The Gospels yield an impressive array of places where Jesus' healings happened: Peter's house, a second house in Capernaum, and a third residence, where a healing took place while Jesus was seventeen miles away in Cana (John 4:46-54). Other healings occurred near Nain just east of Nazareth, in the open country of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis east of the Sea of Galilee, near

Left: The precipice at Nazareth. After Jesus explained that

the Father had sent Him to restore sight to the blind and to set the captives free, the people became

incensed and forced him up the hill at Nazareth and threatened to throw Him over the edge. Matthew explained that the people of Nazareth lacked faith, which kept Jesus from performing any miracles there.

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO: BRENT BRUCE (174-B-0491)



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ (10/17/16)

Above: Close-up of the ruins at Capernaum that are identified as the location of Simon Peter's house.

Left: Pool of Bethesda, where Jesus healed the man who had been crippled for 38 years; near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem.

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ JUSTIN VEHEMAN (6/3/09/92)

Right: Mosaic on the floor of the Church of Multiplication at Tabgha. The church commemorates the site where Jesus fed the 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish. Although all four Gospels record this miracle, only Luke includes the fact that Jesus healed those in the crowd who were sick (9:11).



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ GB HOWELL (8/5/53/98)

Bethsaida, on the border between Galilee and Samaria, on an open road near Jericho, at the pool of Bethesda, and at Gethsemane in Jerusalem.

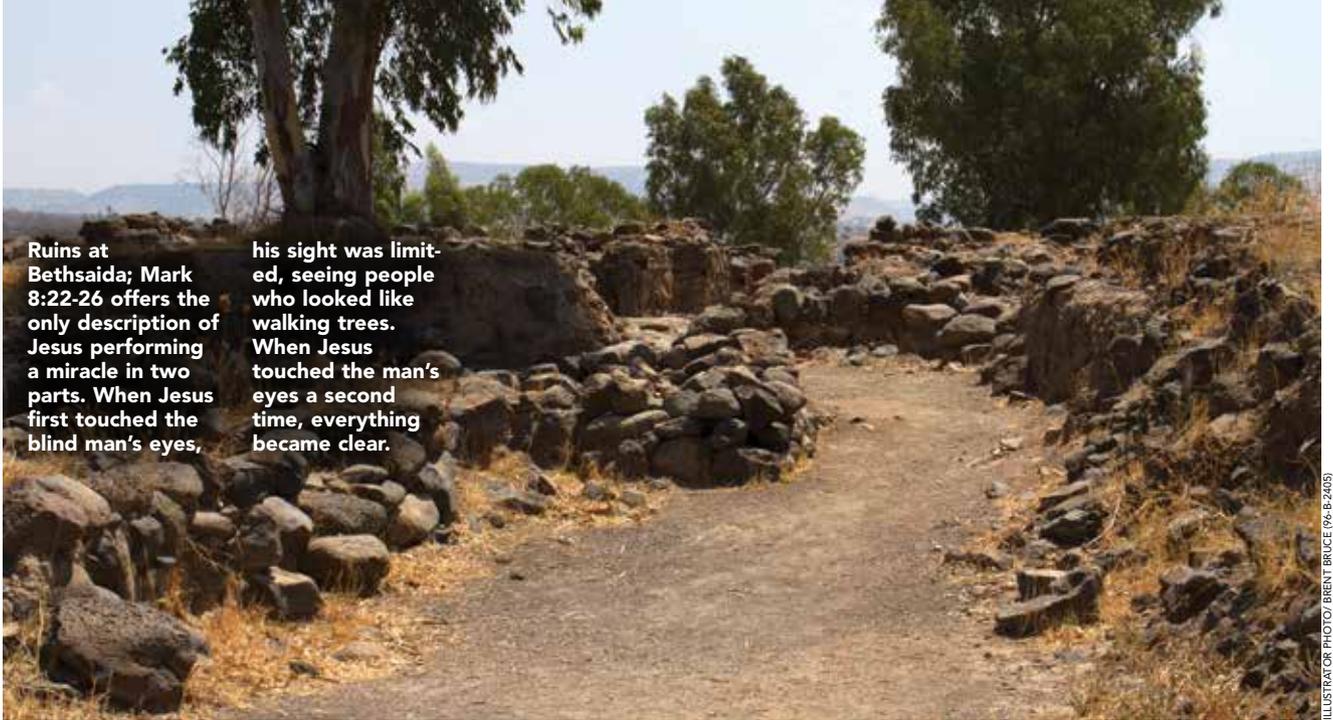
When did Jesus heal? Only one healing story specifies details of a day and hour. This occurred “at one in the afternoon” the previous day, the exact time Jesus assured the nobleman his son would live (John 4:52-53). Several of His healing

miracles took place on Sabbath days (Mark 1:21,29-34; 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-4; John 5:1-15; 9:1-7,16).

Was faith required for healing? Often people say faith must be assumed but the evidence is mixed. Less than half of the stories involving Jesus’ miracles state plainly or strongly imply that the needy people exercised faith (Matt. 9:27-29; Mark 1:40; 5:12-34; 10:46-52; Luke 17:12-19). Some

miracle stories highlight that the faith of others moved Jesus to heal (Matt. 8:10-13; 15:22-28; Mark 2:1-5; 5:35-43; Luke 17:11-19; John 4:46-52). Other stories make no mention of faith, either before or after the healing; Jesus simply acted. Because of the people’s lack of faith, Jesus did not do “many” as opposed to “any” miracles in Nazareth (Matt. 13:58).

Was spiritual salvation included in physical healing? The evidence is ambivalent because one important word for “to heal” (Greek, *sozein*) also means “to save.”⁴ A few instances include both. Jesus both healed the crippled man borne by four and forgave his sin (Mark 2:5,11-12). After curing the woman of her hemorrhaging, Jesus assured her that her faith had “saved” her (5:29,34). To the already-healed Samaritan leper who came back to thank Jesus, the Lord said, “Your faith has saved you” (Luke 17:14-15,19). The same ambiguity shows up in His healing Bartimaeus: “your faith has saved you.” That this formerly blind man then “began to follow Jesus” (Mark 10:52) may speak of spiritual salvation. “Following Jesus” was a common description for living a Christian life (1:18) and early Christianity was called “the Way” (Acts 9:2; 19:23; 24:14).⁵ If in some cases “heal” also means “save,” perhaps it does in Jesus’ other healings, too.



Ruins at Bethsaida; Mark 8:22-26 offers the only description of Jesus performing a miracle in two parts. When Jesus first touched the blind man's eyes,

his sight was limited, seeing people who looked like walking trees. When Jesus touched the man's eyes a second time, everything became clear.

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BRENT BRUCE (96-B-2403)



Left: The village of Nain. Jesus and His disciples entered Nain, accompanied by a large crowd.

Encountering a funeral procession, Jesus stopped the group and raised the widow's son (Luke 7:11-15).

35:5; 42:7). The Bible records no blind persons being healed neither in Old Testament times nor after Jesus' time. If Jesus raised the dead, cleansed lepers, and gave sight to the blind, He must be God in the flesh. Further, Jesus broke rabbinic Sabbath rules that prohibited healing on the Lord's day unless life was threatened (Matt. 3:1-6; Luke 13:17-17; 14:1-6). By healing on the Sabbath Jesus acted as Lord of the Lord's day, meaning He was indeed the Lord God Himself! 🔥

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ KRISTEN HILLER (482214)

Without His miracles, "the figure, fame, and fate of Jesus would have been quite different and probably quite diminished."⁶ His miracles certainly differentiated Him from other first-century rabbis. The miracles functioned on three levels.

Deeds of compassion—Jesus acted to relieve suffering. That is why He fed the hungry, comforted the fearful, freed the demonized, and healed the sick.

Credentials of His Messiahship—Cleansing lepers, healing the deaf-mute, healing the blind, and raising the dead were four great signs Jesus

mentioned (Matt. 11:4; Luke 7:22). Speaking prophetically, the Old Testament foretold that the Messiah would do these things (Isa. 26:19; 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 61:1)!

Proofs of His Deity—Rabbi Johanan said giving new life to the dead was a key God gave to no agent but kept for Himself.⁷ Other rabbis said cleansing a leper was as hard as raising the dead,⁸ meaning only God could do either. Giving sight to the blind did double duty; the Old Testament said giving sight to the blind was a miracle reserved for God (Ex. 4:11; Ps. 146:8) or His Messiah (Isa. 29:18;

1. All Scripture quotations are from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB).
 2. Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, *The NIV Harmony of the Gospels* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988).
 3. Following Donald Senior, "The Miracles of Jesus" in "Aspects of New Testament Thought" in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 1370.
 4. E.M.B. Green, *The Meaning of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 112-13.
 5. *Ibid.*, 114, especially note 1.
 6. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2:4.
 7. Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anith 2a-b, <http://halakhah.com/pdf/moed/Taanith.pdf>.
 8. D.E. Nineham, *Mark, Pelican Commentaries* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), 96.

Cecil R. Taylor is emeritus professor of Christian studies and dean of the School of Christian Studies at the University of Mobile, Mobile, Alabama.