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The Disciple-Making Minister

Biblical Principles for Fruitfulness and Multiplication

By David Servant

Chapter Sixteen

The Healing Ministry of Jesus

It is often thought that because Jesus was the divine Son of God, He could work a miracle or heal anyone anytime He desired. But as we examine the Scriptures closely, we discover that although Jesus was certainly divine, He was apparently self-limited during His earthly ministry. He once said, "The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing" (John 5:19). That clearly shows that Jesus was limited and dependent on His Father.

According to Paul, when Jesus became a human being He "emptied Himself" of certain things that He would have previously possessed as God:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but *emptied Himself*, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:5-7, emphasis added).

Of what did Jesus "empty Himself"? It wasn't His divinity. It wasn't His holiness. It wasn't His love. It must have been His supernatural power. Obviously He was no longer omnipresent (existing everywhere). Likewise, He was no longer omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipotent (all-powerful). Jesus became a man. In His ministry, He operated as a man anointed by the Holy Spirit. This becomes abundantly clear as we look closely at the four Gospels.

For example, we might ask, *If Jesus was the divine Son of God, why was it necessary for Him to be baptized in the Holy Spirit when He began His ministry at age thirty? Why would God need to be baptized with God?*

Clearly, Jesus needed the baptism of the Holy Spirit in order to be anointed for ministry. That is why, soon after His baptism, we read of Him preaching these words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, *because He anointed Me to preach....to proclaim...to set free...*" (Luke 4:18, emphasis added).

That is also why Peter preached, "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how *God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power*, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38, emphasis added).

That is also why Jesus did no miracles until He was baptized in the Holy Spirit at about age thirty. Was He the Son of God at age twenty-five? Certainly. Then why did He do no miracles until age thirty? Simply because Jesus emptied Himself of the supernatural power

that God possesses, and He had to wait for the time when He would be empowered by the Spirit.

More Proof that Jesus Ministered as a Man Anointed by the Spirit

We notice as we read the Gospels that there were times when Jesus possessed supernatural knowledge and other times when He didn't. In fact, Jesus often asked questions to obtain information.

For example, He told the woman at the well of Samaria that she had had five husbands and that she was living with a man now to whom she was not married (see John 4:17-18). How did Jesus know that? Was it because He was God and God knows everything? No, if that were the case, Jesus would have demonstrated that ability consistently. Although He was God and God knows everything, Jesus emptied Himself of His omniscience when He became a man. Jesus knew the marital history of the woman at the well because the Holy Spirit granted Him at that moment the gift of "the word of knowledge" (1 Cor. 12:8), which is the supernatural ability to know something about the present or past. (We will study in more detail the subject of the gifts of the Spirit in the next chapter).

Did Jesus know everything all the time? No, when the woman with the issue of blood touched the hem of Jesus' garment and He felt healing power proceed from Him, He asked, "Who touched My garments?" (Mark 5:30b). When Jesus saw a fig tree in the distance in Mark 11:13, He "went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it."

Why didn't Jesus know who had touched Him? Why didn't He know if the fig tree had figs on it? Because Jesus was operating as a man anointed by the Holy Spirit with gifts of the Spirit. Gifts of the Spirit operate as the Spirit wills (see 1 Cor. 12:11; Heb. 2:4). Jesus didn't know things supernaturally unless the Holy Spirit willed to give Him the gift of "the word of knowledge."

The same thing was true of Jesus' healing ministry. The Scripture makes it plain that Jesus couldn't heal anyone at any time at all. For example, we read in the Gospel of Mark that when Jesus visited His hometown of Nazareth, He was unable to accomplish everything He wanted to do.

And [Jesus] went out from there, and He came into His home town; and His disciples followed Him. And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him. And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his home town and among his own relatives and in his own household." And He *could do no miracle there* except that He laid His hands upon a few sick people and healed them. And He wondered at their unbelief (Mark 6:1-6, emphasis added).

Notice Mark didn't say that Jesus *wouldn't* do any miracle there, but that He *couldn't*. Why? Because the people of Nazareth were unbelieving. They didn't receive Jesus as being the anointed Son of God but only as a local carpenter's son. Just as Jesus Himself remarked, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household" (Mark 6:4). As a result, the most He could accomplish was to heal a few people "with minor ailments" (as one translation says). Surely, if there was any place where Jesus would have wanted to work miracles and dramatically heal people, it would have been the town He had lived most of His life. The Bible says, however, that He could not.

More Insight from Luke

Jesus healed primarily by two different methods: (1) by teaching the Word of God to encourage sick people to have faith to be healed, and (2) by operating in “gifts of healings” as the Holy Spirit willed. Therefore, Jesus was limited by two factors in His healing ministry: (1) by the unbelief of sick people, and (2) by the will of the Holy Spirit to manifest Himself through “gifts of healings.”

Obviously, the majority of the people in Jesus’ hometown did not have faith in Him. Even though they had heard of His healing miracles in other towns, they wouldn’t believe He had power to heal, and consequently He couldn’t heal them. Moreover, apparently the Holy Spirit didn’t grant Jesus any “gifts of healings” in Nazareth—for what reason nobody knows.

Luke records in more detail than Mark exactly what happened when Jesus visited Nazareth:

And [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.” And He closed the book...and He began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, “Is this not Joseph's son?” (Luke 4:16-22).

Jesus wanted His audience to believe that *He* was the promised anointed one of Isaiah’s prophecy, hoping that they would believe and receive all the benefits of His anointing, which according to Isaiah, included freedom from captivity and oppression as well as sight for the blind.¹ But they didn’t believe, and although they were impressed by His speaking ability, they wouldn’t believe Joseph’s son was anyone special. Recognizing their skepticism, Jesus responded,

No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, “Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your home town as well”....Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown (Luke 4:23-24).

The people in Jesus’ hometown were waiting to see if He would do what they heard He had done in Capernaum. Their attitude was not one of expectant faith but skepticism. By their lack of faith they limited Him from performing any miracles or major healings.

Jesus’ Other Limitation in Nazareth

Jesus’ next words to the Nazareth crowd reveal that He was also limited by the will of the Holy Spirit to manifest Himself through “gifts of healings”:

But 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. And there were many lepers in

¹ All of these could well refer to physical healing. Sickness can definitely be considered to be oppression, as Scripture says that “God anointed [Jesus] with the Holy Spirit and with power, and...He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10:38).

Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4:25-27).

Jesus' point was that Elijah couldn't multiply oil and flour to sustain any widow *he* desired during Israel's three-year famine (see 1 Kin. 17:9-16). Although there were numerous suffering widows in Israel at that time, the Spirit anointed Elijah to help a single widow who wasn't even an Israelite. Likewise, Elisha couldn't cleanse just any leper *he* wanted to. This is proved by that fact that there were many lepers in Israel when Naaman was cleansed. If it had purely been his own choice, Elisha would naturally have cleansed fellow Israelites who were lepers before he cleansed Naaman, an idol worshipper. (see 2 Kin. 5:1-14).

Both Elijah and Elisha were prophets—men anointed by the Holy Spirit who were used in various gifts of the Spirit as the Spirit willed. Why didn't God send Elijah to some other widows? I don't know. Why didn't God use Elisha to heal some other lepers? I don't know. Nobody knows, except God.

Those two familiar Old Testament stories do not prove, however, that it wasn't God's will to provide every widow's needs or heal every leper. The people of Israel could have brought an end to their famine during the time of Elijah if they and their wicked king (Ahab) would have repented of their sins. The famine was a form of God's judgment. And all the lepers in Israel could have been healed by obeying and believing the words of their God-given covenant, which, as we have already seen, included physical healing.

Jesus revealed to His audience in Nazareth that He was under the same limitations as were Elijah and Elisha. For some reason, the Holy Spirit didn't give Jesus any "gifts of healings" in Nazareth. That fact, coupled with the unbelief of the people of Nazareth, resulted in no major miracles being performed through Jesus in His hometown.

A Look at One "Gift of Healing" Through Jesus

If we study the Gospel accounts of the various healings performed by Jesus, we find that the majority of the people were healed, not through "gifts of healings," but through their faith. Let us consider the differences between those two types of healings by looking at examples of both. We will first study the story of the crippled man at the pool of Bethesda, healed not by his faith, but through a "gift of healing" through Jesus.

Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, (waiting for the moving of the waters; for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.) A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, "Do you wish to get well?" The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk." Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk (John 5:2-9).

How do we know this man was healed, not by his faith, but through a "gift of healing"? There are several indications.

First, notice that this man hadn't been seeking Jesus. Rather Jesus found him sitting by the pool. If the man had been seeking Jesus, it would have been an indication of faith on his part.

Second, Jesus did not tell the man that his faith had healed him, as He often did when He healed other people.

Third, when the healed man was later questioned by the Jews as to who had told him to “arise and walk,” he responded that he didn’t even know who the Man was. So it definitely wasn’t his faith in Jesus that effected his healing. This was a clear case of someone who was healed through a “gift of healing,” manifested as the Spirit willed.

Notice also that even though there was a multitude of sick people waiting for the stirring of the waters, Jesus healed only one individual and left the remainder of the multitude sick. Why? Again, I don’t know. This incident, however, does not prove that it is God’s will for some to remain sick. Any and all of those sick people could have been healed through faith in Jesus. In fact, this could be the reason why this one man was supernaturally healed—to draw those sick people’s attention to Jesus, the One who could and would heal them if they would only believe.

Many times, “gifts of healings” fall under the category of “signs and wonders,” that is, miracles designed to draw attention to Jesus. That is why New Testament evangelists like Philip were equipped with various “gifts of healings,” because the miracles they performed drew attention to the gospel they were preaching (see Acts 8:5-8).

Sick Christians shouldn’t wait around for someone with “gifts of healings” to come by and heal them because that person and gift may never come. Healing is available through faith in Jesus, and, although not everyone will be healed through gifts of healings, everyone can be healed through his or her faith. Gifts of healings are placed in the church primarily so that unbelievers might be healed and attention might be drawn to the gospel. This is not to say that Christians won’t ever be healed through gifts of healings. God, however, expects His children to receive healing by faith.

One Example of a Person Healed By His Faith

Bartimaeus was a blind man who was healed by his faith in Jesus. Let’s read his story in Mark’s gospel.

Then they came to Jericho. And as [Jesus] was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him here.” So they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you.” Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. And answering him, Jesus said, “What do you want Me to do for you?” And the blind man said to Him, “Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!” And Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road (Mark 10:46-52).

First notice that Jesus didn’t seek Bartimaeus. (This is the exact opposite of what happened with the man at the Pool of Bethesda). In fact, Jesus was walking past him, and if Bartimaeus hadn’t cried out, Jesus would have kept on walking. That means Bartimaeus wouldn’t have been healed.

Now think about that. What if Bartimaeus had sat there and said to himself, “Well, if it’s Jesus’ will for me to be healed, then He’ll come over and heal me.” What would have happened? Bartimaeus never would have been healed, even though this story plainly reveals it was Jesus’ will for him to be healed. The first sign of Bartimaeus’ faith is that he cried out to Jesus.

Second, notice that Bartimaeus would not be discouraged by the ones who were trying to quiet him down. When the people tried to silence him, he just cried out “all the more” (Mark 10:48). That shows his faith.

Third, notice that Jesus didn’t respond to Bartimaeus’ initial cries. Of course, it is possible that He couldn’t hear Bartimaeus’ initial cries, but if He did, Jesus didn’t respond. In other words, Jesus let the man’s faith be tested.

If Bartimaeus had given up after crying out only one time, he would not have been healed. We, too, must sometimes persevere in faith because many times it looks as if our prayer will not be answered. That is when our faith is tested, so we need to continue to stand, refusing to be discouraged by contrary circumstances.

Further Indications of Bartimaeus’ Faith

When Jesus finally called him to come, the Bible says that Bartimaeus “cast aside his cloak.” It is my understanding that blind people in Jesus’ day wore a certain kind of cloak that identified them to the public as being blind. If this is true, perhaps Bartimaeus cast his cloak aside when Jesus called him because he believed he would no longer need to be identified as blind. If that was so, his faith was evident again.

Furthermore, when Bartimaeus cast aside his cloak, the Bible says he “jumped up,” an indication of his excited anticipation that something good was about to happen to him. People who have faith for healing are excited when they pray for God to heal them because they are expecting to receive their healing.

Notice that Jesus tested Bartimaeus’ faith once more as he stood before Him. He asked Bartimaeus what he desired, and from Bartimaeus’ response, it is clear he believed Jesus could and would heal him of his blindness.

Finally, Jesus told him it was his faith that made him well. If Bartimaeus could be healed by faith, so can anyone else because God is “no respecter of persons.”

For Further Study

Below I have listed twenty-one specific cases of healings performed by Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels. Jesus, of course, healed many more than twenty-one people, but in all of these cases we know some details about the sick individual and how he or she was healed.

I’ve broken the list down into two major categories—those who were healed by faith and those who were healed through gifts of healings. I’ve noted that in a number of cases when people were healed by their faith, Jesus told them to keep quiet about their healing. This further indicates that these were not “gifts of healings” because the sick people were not cured in order to advertise Jesus or the gospel.

Cases Where Faith or Believing is Mentioned as the Cause of Healing:

1. The centurion’s servant (or “boy”): Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:2-10 “Let it be done to you as you have believed.”

2. The paralytic lowered through the roof: Matt. 9:2-8; Mark 2:3-11; Luke 5:18-26 “Seeing their faith....He said...’go home.’”

3. Jairus’ daughter: Matt. 9:18-26; Mark 5:22-43; Luke 8:41-56 “Do not be afraid—only believe’....And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this.”

4. The woman with the issue of blood: Matt. 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48 “Your faith has made you well.”

5. Two blind men: Matt. 9:27-31 “Be it done to you according to your faith....See here, let no one know about this!”

6. Blind Bartimaeus: Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43 “Your faith has made you well.”

7. The ten lepers: Luke 17:12-19 “Your faith has made you well.”

8. The Nobleman’s son: John 4:46-53 “The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him.”

In the next four cases, the faith of the sick person is not specifically mentioned, but it is implied by his words or actions. For example, the two blind men (in number 10 below) cried out to Jesus as He was passing by just as blind Bartimaeus did. All of the sick persons in the next four examples sought out Jesus, a clear indication of their faith. In three of the next four cases, Jesus told the ones He healed not to tell anyone about what had happened to them, indicating further that these cases were not “gifts of healings.”

9. The leper who didn’t know God’s will: Matt. 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-14 “See that you say nothing to anyone.”

10. Two blind men (probably one was Bartimaeus): Matt. 20:30-34 “[They] cried out, saying, ‘Lord, have mercy on us!’”

11. The deaf and dumb man: Mark 7:32-36 “And he gave them orders not to tell anyone.”

12. A blind man: Mark 8:22-26 “Do not even enter the village.”

These final two cases of people who were healed through faith were actually not healed—they were delivered from demons. But Jesus credited their faith for effecting their deliverance.

13. The lunatic boy: Matt. 17:14-18; Mark 9:17-27; Luke 9:38-42 “And Jesus said to him... ‘All things are possible to him who believes.’ Immediately the boy’s father cried out... ‘I do believe; help my unbelief.’”

14. The Syrophenician woman’s daughter: Matt. 15:22-28; Mark 7:25-30 “O woman, your faith is great; be it done for you as you wish.”

Cases of People Healed Through “Gifts of Healings”:

These final seven cases are people who apparently were healed through gifts of healings. In the first three cases, however, obedience to a specific command of Jesus was required before the sick person could be healed. In none of these cases did Jesus tell the healed person not to tell anyone of his healing. And in none of these cases did the sick person seek out Jesus.

15. The man with the withered hand: Matt. 12:9-13; Mark 3:1-5; Luke 6:6-10 “Arise and come forward....Stretch out your hand.”

16. The man at the Pool of Bethesda: John 5:2-9 “Arise, take up your pallet, and walk.”

17. The man blind from birth: John 9:1-38 “Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam.”

18. Peter’s mother-in-law: Matt. 8:14-15; Mark 1:30-31; Luke 4:38-39

19. The woman who was bent over for 18 years: Luke 13:11-16

20. The man healed of dropsy: Luke 14:2-4

21. The high priest’s slave: Luke 22:50-51

Notice that in all of the twenty-one examples above, there are no cases of an adult being healed *solely* by another adult’s faith. In every case when someone was healed by another person’s faith, it was always a child being healed through his parent’s faith (see examples 1, 3, 8, 13, and 14).

The only possible exceptions would be examples number 1 and 2, the Centurion’s servant and the paralytic lowered through the roof. In the case of the Centurion’s

servant, the Greek word translated *servant* is the word *pais*, which can also be translated *boy* as it is in Matthew 17:18: "And the *boy* was cured at once" (emphasis added).

If it was actually the centurion's servant and not his son, his servant must have been a young boy. Therefore, the centurion was responsible for the boy as a legal guardian and could exercise faith on his behalf just as any parent could for his or her child.

In the case of the paralytic lowered through the roof, note that the paralytic himself must have also possessed faith, otherwise he would never have allowed his friends to lower him through the roof. Thus he was not healed *solely* by the faith of his friends.

All of this indicates that it is unlikely that one adult's faith can result in the healing of another adult if that sick adult does not have faith himself. Yes an adult can pray in agreement with another adult who needs healing, but the sick person's unbelief can potentially nullify the effects of the other adult's faith.

Our own children, however, can be healed through our faith, up to a certain age. Yet they will eventually reach an age when God expects them to receive from Him based on their own faith.

I encourage you to study closely every example listed above in your own Bible to strengthen your faith in the healing provision of our Lord.

The Healing Anointing

Finally, it is important to know that Jesus was anointed with tangible healing power during His earthly ministry. That is, He could actually feel that healing anointing leaving His body, and in some cases the sick person who was being healed could feel that anointing as it entered his body. For example, Luke 6:19 says, "And all the people were trying to touch Him, for power was coming from Him and healing them all."

Apparently that healing anointing even saturated Jesus' clothes so that, if a sick person touched His garment in faith, the healing anointing would flow into his body. We read in Mark 6:56:

Wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured.

The woman with the issue of blood (see Mark 5:25-34) was healed by simply touching the fringe of Jesus' garment and expecting by faith to be healed.

Not only was Jesus anointed with a tangible healing anointing but so was the apostle Paul during the later years of his ministry:

God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out (Acts 19:11-12).

The tangible healing anointing saturated any cloths that were attached to Paul's body, evidently indicating that cloth is a good conductor of healing power!

God hasn't changed since the days of Jesus or Paul, so we shouldn't be surprised if God anoints some of His servants today with such a healing anointing, as He did Jesus and Paul. These gifts, however, are not passed out to novices, but only to those who have proven themselves faithful and unselfishly motivated over a period of time.