

Sermon for Sunday, April 9, 1978, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"THE HAND OF JESUS NO. I-THE HEALING TOUCH"

St. Matthew 8:1-13

Text: "And he stretched out his hand and touched him saying, 'I will be clean' and immediately his leprosy was cleansed." St. Matthew 8:3

On Easter Sunday and the Sunday following Easter, I preached on the same passage of scripture, the 20th chapter of St. John. As I studied those passages, I was struck by the fact that the Bible says that Jesus showed them his hands. I began to search through the gospels to find other instances when the Bible spoke of the hands of Jesus. There are so many instances when the Bible tells us that Jesus stretched forth his hand that I will not attempt to enumerate them for you. However, those passages which speak of the hand of Jesus fall into five major categories. So, for today and the next four Sundays, I am going to talk about those five categories. If you would like to investigate for yourself, when you go home, get a concordance and begin to look at all of the passages where the hand of Jesus is mentioned. Study them. See what God has to say to us through the hands of Jesus.

The first category of instances where the hand of Jesus is mentioned has to do with healing. There are a number of times in the Gospels when the Bible tells us that Jesus stretched forth his hand to heal someone. So this morning I want to talk about the healing touch of Jesus. In our scripture, we read how a leper came to Jesus and said, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." And the Bible says, "And he stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I will be clean.'" Here we see how Jesus reached out to touch and to heal.

The first point I want to make this morning is this: You have to make up your mind about God and health. Is sickness God's plan for us? Is bad health somehow God's judgment and punishment on us to teach us patience in suffering? Does God mean for us to feel bad and is it his plan for us to suffer from disease? Well, I think the first thing the New Testament teaches us is that Jesus was on the side of wholeness and health. He was opposed to illness. There is not a single instance where Jesus says that bad health is God's punishment or God's will. As a matter of fact, on one occasion, the religious leaders asked him about a man's physical disability and said, "did this happen because of man's sin or the sin of his parents?" And Jesus replied, "Well, it wasn't due to that cause at all." In other words, illness was not God's punishment.

So, the Bible teaches us that Jesus was against illness. He was against pain and disability and bodily malfunctions. Whatever physical problem you may have this morning, get it fixed in your mind that it is not God's will for you. God may permit sickness and pain and even terminal illness, but that is not God's desire, that is not God's plan for you. God's will is always on the side of health and wholeness.

The second point I want to make this morning is this: You have to make up your mind about yourself and health. You see, we are just beginning to discover the relationship between the mind and bodily health. For example, some of you may have seen in yesterday's Globe Democrat an article headlined, "Psyche can help produce--and cure cancer, 2 claim." The article went on to describe how a husband and wife medical team had been conducting psychotherapeutic experiments with terminally ill cancer patients. They have concluded that the psyche--or mind--can help produce cancer and can help cure it. One of the researchers states that the idea of psychological intervention in treatment of malignancies is now fairly well received in the medical profession.

Now, actually, this is not particularly new. For example, we have known for a long time that stress can produce temporary chemical changes in the body and do serious

damage

/if the stress is lengthy or severe enough. See how it works! Suppose I say to you, "Don't move! There is a rattle snake under your pew about to strike your leg!" What happens next? Well, if you don't believe me, you relax and laugh at my joke and nothing happens to your body. But if you believe me, all sorts of things begin to happen to your body. Your pulse leaps, your breathing becomes heavy as your body takes in more oxygen, your stomach stops digesting, sugar and adrenalin go into your blood stream. Your body is gearing itself for the emergency. And what have we proved? We have proved that what you believe has a tremendous impact on your body. What you believe can effect your body.

Here is another illustration. What can worry do to you? Worry is a mental process that causes bodily reaction. Your mind is impacting your body. Worry can cause you to have ulcers. That means a mental process is causing a physical reaction. But the question is, can the process be reversed? What is the opposite of worry? Would it be faith? Then the question is, if worry causes a bodily reaction that makes you well?

So first, you have to make up your mind about God--is he on the side of health and wholeness? And second, you have to make up your mind about yourself--can what you think influence your health? The third point I want to make is this: you have to make up your mind about the role of your doctor. If you will study your New Testament carefully, you will discover that Jesus does not condemn other efforts to heal in a single instance. As a matter of fact, in those ancient days, one of the primitive methods of medical treatment was to rub the patient with oil. Therefore, in the book of James, the writer says, "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." That is combining a religious act with a medical act.

But the point is this: God has made our physical world in an orderly law-abiding fashion. All science, including medicine, is simply discovering how God has ordered his world. It is, as one writer has put it, thinking God's thoughts after him. Therefore, if a man believes in God, he can believe in medical science. After all, God invented it. To refuse medical treatment is to deny God's order for his world. So when a Christian gets sick, he will call the doctor and he will pray. Let me make that clear. God's healing and medical treatment are not two different things. They are both a part of God's mighty power, God's mighty work, God's wonderful planning. I have had people say to me, "well, pastor, if I go to the medical doctor am I not showing a lack of trust in God's power to heal? Am I not showing a lack of faith?" And the answer is no. No, actually you are trusting the order and harmony of the world God has created when you take advantage of the wonderful way in which God has made us and our world.

The fourth point I want to make this morning is this: You need to make up your mind what God's primary concern for you is. The so-called faith healers sometimes distress me. They distress me because they give the impression that God's only concern is my body, my physical health. Yet, the fact is, the New Testament makes it clear that God's first concern is always my spiritual well-being. As a matter of fact, physical healing was somewhat secondary in the ministry of Jesus. Because he had compassion on the multitudes, the Bible tells us that he worked miracles of healing. Yet, the Bible also tells us that his first concern was to preach the gospel. On at least one occasion we are told that when the healing interfered with his preaching he moved on to another place. And once when a city tried to keep him there because of his healing, he replied that he must preach the Kingdom of God to other cities also for that was why he had been sent.

So God's primary concern for you is your spiritual well-being. God is most of all concerned about your heart, about your relationship to him. What is the greatest thing God could do for you this morning? If you say that it is for God to make you

well, you misunderstand God completely. If you think that the greatest thing God could do for you was to secure your job, make you well, heal your marriage, or give you financial security, you have missed the point completely. And while God may desire those things for you and in some cases provide them for you, God's first concern is always with your heart--with your spiritual relationship to him. We know God loves us not because we have health or wealth or happiness or freedom from care. No, we know God loves us because Jesus died for us. It's like the farmer who had a weather vane on his barn that had a cross and under it the words, "God is Love." A friend asked him what it meant and he replied, "It means whichever way the wind blows, God is love."

So there are four things you have to make up your mind about. First, is God on the side of sickness or health? Second, is your inner attitude on the side of sickness or health (and I need to talk one Sunday about how to deal with those inner attitudes) Third, you have to make up your mind about your doctor and his role. Fourth, you have to make up your mind as to what God's primary concern for you is.

Now, having said all that, let me ask you this question: Does God care about your health? Does it matter to God that you feel bad or are sick? Well, you know the answer to that. You matter to God. He cares. Time and time again the Bible tells us how Jesus reached out in compassion to touch people with healing and health and wholeness.

How do you open your life to receive the healing touch? The Bible tells us that there are two things consistently associated with healing. First, there is prayer. When Jesus raised Lazarus, first he prayed. When his disciples couldn't heal a little boy, Jesus came down from the mountain where he had been in communion with God and healed the child. He said to his disciples, "This takes prayer." As D.S. Cairns in his classic book, The Faith That Rebels, puts it, "The will of God is not wholly fixed and unalterable. It is the will of our Father, who is aware of our needs and longings, and who desires that we should plead with Him and prevail. By granting us access to himself in prayer, he had given us control over the mightiest of all powers. We have the right to use this power, and to win for ourselves the interposition of God even when he seems most unwilling."

Do you remember how Jesus put it? He said, "if you will ask anything in my name, I will do it." So, God wants us to ask, to pray.

The second thing associated with healing is faith. Time and time again the Bible tells us of someone's faith--the faith of the person being healed, the faith of loved ones around an ill person such as the Centurion and his servant or such as the friends of the paralytic who let him down through the roof to Jesus' feet. Lack of faith somehow limits God. The Bible tells us that in one place Jesus, "Did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief." (St. Matthew 13:58)

In our Scripture this morning the leper said to Jesus, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." He had faith. His faith didn't heal him--it only made it possible. Jesus replied, "I will." Sometimes God may say, "I won't." But without the prayer and faith to make it possible, he can never say, "I will." So make up your mind--make up your mind about God, about yourself, about your doctor, about what God's first concern for you is--and then, pray and have faith. You see, Jesus wants you well.