

HEALED BY GOD

Sermon delivered by Barry Torman to Northeast Presbyterian Church, St. Petersburg, FL
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Scripture Reading - 2 Kings 20:1-19 (Hezekiah's Illness)

Three years ago my father died. He had prostate cancer that had spread to his spine. And, although that caused him pain, it's not what killed him. He died of complications from an ankle fracture. Shortly after the surgery, I spoke with the surgeon who repaired the bone fracture in his ankle. He told me the surgery had gone very well, and that my father should be up and walking on the ankle shortly. From his point of view, the surgery was a success, but for my father, the outcome was less than desirable. I offer up this story because it illustrates an important point – the outcome of an illness is not predictable. We expected my father to eventually die of cancer. Instead he died of heart failure. The surgeon who repaired his ankle was proud of the ankle repair, but my Dad never walked on it. The only thing we can be certain of is that we can't predict the future. Only God knows what's in store for us. But, through the story of Hezekiah, God provides a picture of what He expects of us when we become seriously ill.

One of the most common prayer requests is for healing. When we're sick, we ask God to make us well. God, please take away this cancer. God, please take away my pain. God, please help me to stand. God, please help me to sleep. God, please remove this disease from my body. God, please help me to breathe. God, please help me to see. God, please help me to recover. Even people who don't pray very often will turn to God and ask for His help when they become ill.

Hezekiah was no different. When Isaiah told him he was going to die, he prayed. He reminded God that he had been faithful and devoted, and that he had done things that were pleasing to the Lord. He had been strong in faith and deeds. And God sent Isaiah back to tell Hezekiah that he would heal him...in three days...and give him 15 additional years of life. Isaiah prescribes a poultice of figs to be placed upon the boil. And what's Hezekiah's response? How will I know that the Lord will heal me in three days, he asks Isaiah. What sign will God give me?

This is the same guy who just a few minutes earlier was reminding God of how strong his faith was...and now here he is asking for a sign. Pay particular attention to the fact that when Isaiah told him that he was going to die, Hezekiah didn't ask for any proof. He was convinced that Isaiah was bringing him a message from God. After all, he could see the festering boil on his body, he felt the pain that it produced, and he knew that he wasn't getting any better.

But, when Isaiah comes to tell him that God has heard his prayer and that He will heal him in 3 days, he wants assurance. How does he know that the figs are going to work? What if Isaiah is just playing with him? If he's going to trust God in the matter of his healing, he needs proof. And, God gives him proof. He moves the sun back ten

steps...just so Hezekiah can be assured that Isaiah's message of healing has truly come from God.

Later, after he's been healed, emissaries arrive from Babylon bearing a gift from the Babylonian king's son. He's heard of the miraculous healing and wants to know more. Hezekiah takes the visitors on a tour of the palace and shows them all of his wealth. The gold, the silver, the spices. Scripture tells us that there was nothing that he didn't reveal. After all, he was very proud of all the wealth he had collected, and he took this opportunity to show it off.

But, Isaiah sees the visitors and tells Hezekiah that because of his actions, all of the wealth that has been accumulated by him and his ancestors will be carried off to Babylon, as will some of his sons, and they will be castrated and serve in the palace of the King of Babylon.

And how does Hezekiah react? He says that if that's what God wants, then it is good. But all he really cares about is that these events will happen after his death -- he will not have to deal with them.

I think that God gave us the story of Hezekiah to teach us some important lessons about how we relate to God – especially at a difficult moment in our life. Hezekiah's failings are often our failings.

First, we see that Hezekiah lacked faith. Instead of trusting Isaiah's message that God was going to heal him, he demanded proof. This was clearly a test, and Hezekiah failed it. God could have healed him immediately and miraculously, but instead he sends Isaiah back with the message that God would heal Hezekiah in three days.

Hezekiah had appealed to God for healing based on his works -- what he felt he deserved. I've been faithful, he tells God, and devoted. And, I've accomplished things that have made you happy. So, God decides to test his faith by shifting the healing to the future, which is always uncertain. He didn't question the illness, because it was in the present. But, he lacked the faith to believe that God was going to heal him three days in the future.

Second, we see that Hezekiah was proud. When the dignitaries from Babylon arrived, he showed off all his possessions...like a guy who's just bought a fancy new car, and can't wait to show it to his neighbors. Nothing wrong with owning a fancy new car, by the way. But if you become too proud of that car or any possession the Lord has given you, then it's not pleasing to God. In this instance, we KNOW that God was testing Hezekiah. It doesn't tell us that in 2nd Kings. But, the story of Hezekiah appears in three old testament books. The 2nd Kings rendition is the story as it was recorded by Hezekiah's own scribe. In the book of Isaiah, we get the story from the prophet's perspective. And, in 2nd Chronicles we get the story from the perspective of the priests. And that's where we see in chapter 32 verse 31 an entry that's not recorded in either of the other two accounts.

³¹ But when envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask him about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart.

What did Hezekiah do? Or, more exactly, what didn't he do that caused him to fail the test? He failed to give God the glory. He failed to give Him the credit. He was healed by God...he knew that because he'd seen the proof. He watched the sun move backward. There couldn't be any doubt that God had sent the healing. The medication provided by Isaiah was sent from God. But, when the envoys asked about the miraculous healing that occurred, Hezekiah failed to give the glory to God. He probably told them about the poultice of figs and how it took away the boil. But, he didn't want to tell them that in his darkest moment he cried out to the Lord for help and wept before the Lord. He was a king, and he was proud, and simply forgot to mention that God had performed the miracle that brought him back from death's door.

Finally, we see that Hezekiah was selfish. He knew that he'd blown it with the envoys. He knew that his pride had gotten in the way of doing what was right in the sight of God. And, he knew by now that Isaiah was able to predict the future. So, when Isaiah told him that all the riches were going to be carried off to Babylon, and that his sons were going to become eunuchs in service to the King of Babylon, he knew it was true. But, so long as it didn't directly affect him, he didn't care. It was in the future, but it wasn't in his future. So, he was okay with it.

Here was a ruler who was arguably one of the best kings of Israel. This is the man who at age 25 inherited a disorganized and disheartened country from his father Ahaz. And, in the first month he repaired and reopened the temple, reinstated the Passover celebration, and abolished idol worship. But, even though his faithfulness was acclaimed by the people, he was still subject to human failings.

So, what's the takeaway from the story of Hezekiah? What is God trying to teach us about how to behave in the face of illness? There are six lessons about God's healing power that I have learned from this story that I'd like to share with you:

First, you need to have the faith to believe that God can heal you if he chooses to do so.

In Mark 10:46 we read that as Jesus was leaving Jericho a blind man named Bartimaeus asked Jesus to heal him. ⁵²"Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

In Luke 8:43 we read about a woman with an incurable bleeding disorder who is healed when she touches Jesus's robe. He says to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

In Acts 14:8 we read that Paul was in Lystra and there before him sat a man crippled in his feet. The man had never walked. ⁹He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul

looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

In all three cases, the person needing to be healed exhibited great faith that God could heal them if He chose to do so, and in all three cases, the healing was immediate. God didn't make them wait three days, because he didn't need to. They had the faith that could move mountains...and all they needed was for God to choose to respond.

The second lesson we learn from Hezekiah is that you must pray earnestly for God to heal you.

Prayer is the means by which you communicate your deepest desires to God, along with thanks for all he has provided to you, but I would like to add that prayer is the means by which you speak your faith into existence. God didn't think the world into being. He spoke the words of creation. And, when you speak to God in prayer, you affirm to God what is truly in your heart.

Moses prayed. So did Noah, Job, Jonah, Hezekiah, David, Solomon, and Jesus and his disciples. Prayer is one of the best ways we know to experience God. If you don't pray for yourself, how can the prayers of others be as effective, since your failure to pray is a sign of little faith.

Of course God already knows what's in your heart. But, when you speak the meditations of your heart to God you affirm to Him what has simply existed as a thought, and it establishes your true level of commitment.

Lesson Number 3: You should enlist others to pray for you, using their influence with God on your behalf.

In Exodus 10:17 Pharaoh asked Moses to pray for him, and he did.

In Paul's letter to the Romans chapter 15:30, Paul asks the believers to pray for him.

In 2 Cor 1:10 Paul asks the Corinthians to continue to pray for him.

In Numbers 12, when Aaron and Miriam became jealous of the relationship their brother Moses had with God, the Lord was so angry that He turned Miriam into a leper. Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "O God, please heal her!" And, she was healed. Moses used his influence with God to reverse the affliction that God had brought upon his sister.

In Job 42:7, God tells Job's friends that they can only be spared from destruction if Job prays for them. And, when Job prayed for his friends, God not only accepted Job's prayer, he also restored Job's wealth and his happiness at that precise moment. By his act of prayer (and forgiveness), Job ends up receiving a special blessing. Keep that in mind when someone asks you to pray for them.

And perhaps the best directive for each of us to pray for others comes in the book of James 5:14: ¹⁴Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. And it goes on to say, The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Lesson Number 4: You must accept the outcome as being God's will, no matter what it is. People always want a positive outcome from their own perspective, but God's perspective is all that matters.

I tell you this. If you have a chronic illness, or you're diagnosed with a terminal illness, and you begin your prayers for healing with the knowledge in your heart that God's will is perfect, and that the outcome might be healing or might not be, you will have a peace about you in the present that can make each day more bearable. Those who look back on good times can easily become depressed, and healing will not come easily to someone who is depressed. And, those who try to assure themselves that a miracle is just around the corner will eventually be disappointed if it doesn't arrive. If you can trust in God's judgment, you will live in the moment, and be much happier.

The people who claim that they will be healed because they have faith in God actually have very little faith. The faith they have is conditional. If God doesn't provide what they want, then they will be mad at God and they will lose faith in God. But, God chooses to bless whom he chooses to bless. He heals whom He chooses to heal. And, your only hope of being healed by God is to get your heart into such a state that it acknowledges God's sovereignty over your life. When you gave your life to Jesus, you surrendered all control over what happens to you. You trusted in God to provide for you. And, you agreed to accept God's will for you unconditionally.

In Matthew 26:39 Jesus falls with his face to the ground and prays, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

And later, in verse 42 he says, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

Even the son of God, who had great influence with the Father, acknowledged that it was God's will He sought, and He was willing to accept the outcome.

Lesson number 5: The healing will only last for as long as God decides it will last. Some people say that if a person is healed of a serious illness and it returns, then that means they weren't truly healed. I say that healing comes with a lifetime guarantee, but God determines the length of your life.

Healing is never permanent. It simply marks the beginning of a season in your life when you will not experience pain or suffering, but even a healing that lasts for a short time is still a healing.

What you do once you're healed may influence God's decision of how long the season will last. God gave Hezekiah 15 years. And, Hezekiah used those years for construction projects. He was the one who constructed the aqueduct that brought water into the city of Jerusalem. He was a king who served his people. If you are healed by God, you need to think about how you will serve others.

And lesson number 6, if God heals you, you must give God the glory.

Ask a person of faith about his or her recent major surgery, and he will very likely begin by telling you how great his doctor was. "He's one of the best in the country" is a popular phrase. Have you ever heard someone say that? When I hear that phrase, I wonder who's having surgeries performed by the other 99%? Are they crazy, or is that they just don't know how to find a good doctor?

Doctors are only as great as God chooses for them to be. God provides healing through the work of doctors and nurses and medical researchers. But, they aren't the ones who provide the healing. God does. Plus no one. So, why do we have difficulty telling people we were healed by God? Does it sound too trite? Or, too egotistical? It's clear in scripture that God wants the glory for healing. He wants you to thank him privately and publicly. Do you remember the story of the 10 lepers that asked Jesus for healing? In Luke 17 verse 15, we read: ¹⁵One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?" ¹⁸Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

If you pray to God for healing, and ask others to pray for you, and if God then chooses to heal you, He may be watching to see what you do next. If you fail to give Him the credit for the healing, you demonstrate that, like Hezekiah, you didn't really have faith. And you, like Hezekiah, will fail God's test. God wants to be worshipped, and praised for all of the blessings you receive from him.

Some of you know that 13 years ago, when we first arrived in St. Petersburg, our daughter Casey was diagnosed with spinal cord compression, and was confined to a wheelchair. She'd been born with a severe kyphosis and scoliosis, mental retardation, profound hearing loss, and dislocated hips, but the curvature of her spine was the most urgent problem when we arrived in Florida. Her spine was collapsing, and there was imminent danger of her becoming a paraplegic. We brought her before the elders of this church – strangers who we had just met – and they laid hands on and prayed for her and anointed her with oil. Then we took her to Boston and told her surgeon that she had been prayed up for the surgery, and that we were praying for him as well. He smiled and thanked us politely. Then came the 9 hour surgery to open the curvature 15 degrees and insert a shunt to hold it in place. She'd still have a severe scoliosis and kyphosis, but the blood flow would be improved to her legs, and she would hopefully regain her ability to walk.

At the end of the 9 hours, the surgeon called us into a small ante room to give us his report. "I made an anterior incision", he told us in Doctor-speak, "and a posterior incision as well, so that we could remove one of the vertebrae at the apex of the kyphosis. But, I noticed some unexpected play in her spine, so I massaged it for about 20 minutes with the base of my palm, and her whole spine straightened out. Your daughter," he told us, "now has a completely straight spine." On that day in 1995, Casey was healed by God.

We continue to thank God for that miracle, and we continue to give God the glory. The surgeon in Boston was Dr. John Hall, since retired from practice, and regarded by many as one of the best pediatric orthopedic surgeons in the world. But, on that day he was simply an instrument of God.

If the Lord chooses to heal you as He did Casey, He won't just provide healing. He will provide the perfect outcome, because (as it says in Jer 29:11) He knows the plans He has for you...plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Your job is to:

1. Believe that God can heal you if he chooses to.
2. Pray to God that He will heal you.
3. Ask others to pray for you, including elders who are ordained for that service.
4. Accept the outcome as God's will, no matter what it is.
5. Acknowledge that the healing will only last for as long as God decides that it will last.
6. If God heals you, even for a short time, give Him the glory, testify to His healing power in your life, and serve others whose needs are greater than your own.

Although my father died unexpectedly following the ankle surgery I told you about, he was 88 years old, and I know that he would have died sooner or later of the cancer. But, since he accepted Christ as his savior shortly before he died, I would say that the outcome was positive, especially from God's perspective.

May Jesus Christ be praised.