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Matthew 12:15 - 12:21



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg explores the healing ministry of Jesus in Matthew 12:15-21. He believes that Jesus' healing power is available today, but we have to believe in what the Word of God says, not merely what we want it to say. Gregg notes that although Jesus healed many people, there were instances in which he did not heal, such as Trophimus in 2 Timothy 4. Gregg also discusses the prophecy in Matthew regarding Jesus' healing ministry, noting that he "will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets."

Transcript

We're turning today to Matthew chapter 12 and beginning at verse 15. Now, essentially we read that Jesus this passage begins with the words when Jesus knew it. Now, of course, that presupposes that the reader has read the previous verse and we did but it was a it was in our last session and you might not remember what it was.

Now, just before this Jesus had angered the Pharisees because he healed a man of a withered hand on the Sabbath day and that was against the customs of their law. And the previous verse, verse 14 says, then the Pharisees went out and took counsel against him how they might destroy him. And by destroy him it was not just a matter of wanting to destroy his reputation as we find later on they desired to kill him.

And it says when he knew about that he withdrew from there. Now, it shows that Jesus, although he was willing to be in their face, as it were, to overturn their wrong notions and to illustrate the wrongness of their attitudes about the Sabbath or whatever, yet when he knew there were plots against him, he didn't feel obligated to just stand around and wait to be arrested. He relocated.

This is agreeable with what he told his own disciples in the 10th chapter of Matthew when he said, when they persecute you in one city, flee to the next. Now, he didn't say to do this out of fear. He said to do this because, he says, you will not have covered all the villages of Israel until the Son of Man comes.

And whatever he may have meant by that, it is very clear that he's saying, if they're not receptive to you in one place, rather than staying around and getting persecuted, go to

somewhere else. There's always plenty of other work to do elsewhere. And you don't need to waste your effort or throw away your life, as it were, just staying in the place where you're being persecuted.

And I want to say this, that there, of course, are times where that would be maybe different. There would be times where God does not allow us a way of escape from persecution, because persecution can be good for us, and it can be to the glory of God. The Bible teaches that.

There are times when escaping persecution is either not possible, because maybe a person lives in a country where the borders are closed, and they just can't get out, or maybe not desirable. Maybe not what God is actually leading a person to do. On the other hand, there is no shame in relocating in order to extend the tenure of your ministry, or of your activities, that if you're serving God now, there's reason to believe that there'd be good cause to continue serving God for a longer period of time, unless God shortens that by putting you in a situation you can't escape.

Jesus, obviously, at this point, did not feel it was his time to go. It was not his time to die. There was more work to be done.

And so when he heard that they were wanting to kill him, he left there. He went somewhere else. Now, he didn't go underground, not on this occasion, anyway.

He later seemed to have done so. Near the time of his arrest, at the end of his life, he does seem to have been, you know, sneaking around in the dark, and that's why the enemies of his needed to hire someone like Judas to tell them where they could find him. He was teaching publicly in the daytime, but hiding out at night, in that final week of his life.

And so there are times when Jesus actually, you know, was hiding from people. But on this occasion, it's not so much he was hiding. He just went somewhere else.

And there were plenty of people who knew where he was. It says there were multitudes following him, and he healed them all. So we see that Jesus knew there'd be multitudes everywhere who needed what he had to offer, and if this is a place where his life was going to be in danger, being cut short, and his activities cut short, he might as well go somewhere else and find multitudes elsewhere who had need of what he had to say and would be more receptive.

Now, in saying he healed them all, this is very important for us to pause a moment and to think about this. Jesus, obviously, the Bible makes it clear, was able to heal every kind of disease that he encountered. He encountered things like leprosy, blindness, dumbness, paralysis, you know, a flow of internal bleeding, blood, a flow that had gone on for 12 years, unabated.

Instantaneously, he could heal such things. There's really nothing he couldn't heal. And on this occasion, we read that wherever he met sick people, he healed them all.

At the same time, the Bible does not teach that Jesus healed everyone he met at all times. In this particular campaign, he healed, apparently, everybody who came to him. But that doesn't mean that Jesus never allowed sickness to remain or to work its course in people who wanted to be healed.

We think of Lazarus, his friend, in John chapter 11. Lazarus was sick. The sisters of Lazarus sent word to Jesus, hoping he would come and heal him.

Jesus didn't heal him. Jesus waited until the sickness had run its course and killed the man. That is, the man died of his sickness.

Now, of course, Jesus did raise him from the dead. But the point is, he didn't heal him when they wanted him to heal him. He allowed the man to die of his sickness.

And we can see from this that Jesus did not heal every sick person that came to him, at least not before their death, he didn't. We could say, well, when Lazarus was raised from the dead, he's probably well then, instead of still sick. And that's no doubt true.

But I'm trying to apply this actually to our own expectations concerning healing, because many people feel that God has promised and is in some way obligated to heal all sicknesses today, at least of believers. And therefore, they hold out an expectation that no matter what sickness they have, they will be miraculously cured by prayer and by trusting God in the matter. Now, such faith is perhaps commendable if a person is willing to believe the Word of God beyond all indications in the natural.

But in my opinion, believing the Word of God means we need to believe what it says, not what we want it to say. And many people, I think, want the Word of God to say that Jesus healed everyone he encountered who was sick, and therefore it is in his nature to never leave anyone sick who trusts in him. And if this is true, then of course, since Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, then even today it would not be his nature or his character to leave any of us sick if we're trusting in him.

And this being so, people who believe such things are encouraged to believe that he will heal them, no matter when or how often or what kind of sickness they have. Now, let me put my own spin or balance on this. I believe in healing.

I have myself been healed on numerous occasions by prayer. I know the healing power of God. However, I do not find anywhere in the Scripture that promises instantaneous healing by miraculous means to everybody who asks for it.

And I do not even find that Jesus offered it or provided it to everyone who asked for it when he was on earth. Nor do I find a promise that since he has ascended, he will

continue to heal everyone who asks for it. I believe that Jesus heals today just as much as he healed in biblical times.

But I don't believe that even then he healed all people who were sick. Now, of course, on this particular campaign, it says, as he was traveling about in these multitudes of people, he healed all of their sicknesses. Okay, well, there was no one in this case who was left sick, and they were all healed.

But that does not mean that throughout his entire ministry he never left a person sick who asked for healing. And as I said, his own friend Lazarus is a good example of one of those exceptions. We also know that in Acts chapter 3, when Peter and John were on their way to the temple for our prayer, they found there a man who'd been laying there for 38 or 40 years, crippled, and they healed him.

But what I find significant about this is that this man was laid at the east gate, which is called the beautiful gate of the temple, and Jesus had gone through that gate seven times in one week, only about two months earlier. And if this man had been laid there repeatedly for the past 40 years, then it's impossible to imagine that Jesus would not have gone by him on several occasions in just a few weeks earlier. And yet Jesus had not healed the man.

And yet he did get healed later through the ministry of Peter and John. Now, we can deduce from this that even in biblical times, although God certainly healed and Jesus healed and showed there was no disease that could really thwart his power to heal, that doesn't mean he healed in every case. It wasn't a matter that he found some sicknesses he couldn't heal.

It must be that for whatever purposes he had, he did not always find it right to heal or desirable to heal, and therefore he did not. This was true even in the book of Acts, where we read of a great number of healings worked through the apostles, and the majority of them worked through Paul the apostle. And yet Paul himself could not heal everybody, even his companions.

His friend Timothy had frequent infirmities in his stomach, and Paul advised Timothy to just to use some wine to help medicate that condition, because it was the best he could do with the situation. Apparently Paul was not able to heal his friend Timothy of those frequent stomach infirmities. Likewise, he left Trophimus sick in Miletum, according to a statement Paul made in 2 Timothy chapter 4. His friend Trophimus was sick, and Paul couldn't get him healed.

He had to leave him there sick. And there are other instances where we read that Paul had to announce that his companions were beyond his ability to cure. But that doesn't mean that it was because there were some sicknesses which the power of God through Paul couldn't cure.

It's just some cases that God did not choose to heal. Even Paul's own thorn in the flesh is no doubt a case of the same thing, though some people would argue that Paul's thorn in the flesh was not a sickness. He himself refers to that thorn in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 twice in the passage where he's discussing it.

He calls it an infirmity. And the word infirmity that Paul uses about his thorn is the same word that is used in Matthew 8, 17, where it says that Jesus carried our infirmities. Same Greek word.

Now some people say, well when Jesus carried our infirmities, that means that he took all of our sicknesses. And then Paul took the same word, infirmity, and applied it to his thorn in the flesh. And he says that he had asked God three times to remove this thing.

And God said, no, my grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in your weakness. And so God did not choose to heal Paul of this infirmity.

Likewise in Galatians, Paul mentions that when he had come to the Galatians initially, he came because of physical infirmity. He uses that as an expression of his own physical health. Paul experienced physical infirmity, a thorn in his flesh.

His friends Timothy and Trophimus also were sick. Paul apparently was not able to help them get well. Although on other occasions Paul was able to raise the dead, heal all kinds of sicknesses, and cast out demons, it's clear that there are times in Scripture where God desires to heal.

And certainly there's enough instances of it in Scripture to illustrate that there's no condition that God would be unable to heal if he chooses to do so. And yet there are times when God, both in the ministry of Jesus and in the ministry of the apostles, and today, does not choose to heal, although he can. Now from this we must deduce, I think, that there are times when God in his mercy judges that for a person to remain sick will serve a better purpose for their well-being and for his kingdom's sake than for them to be healed.

And the Bible agrees with this in other places too. The psalmist said in Psalm 119, it is good for me that I've been afflicted. And it certainly is often the case good for us to experience affliction and hardship and even sickness.

And the Bible does not teach otherwise, although some Christians do. They do not, in my opinion, have the Scriptures on their side. Now in this particular campaign that we read of in Matthew chapter 12, Jesus did not leave anybody sick.

He chose to heal them all. And it says in verse 16, Matthew 12, 16, and he warned them not to make him known. Now when it says he warned them, apparently he means the sick.

When he healed the sick, he warned them not to make him known. Now this is one of the more fascinating things that recurs in the life of Jesus as we read again and again. When he heals a leper, when he casts demons out, when he raises a dead person like Jairus' daughter, when he heals people, that it was very common for Jesus to say, don't tell anyone about this.

And that's apparently what it's saying here when it says he warned them not to make him known. Now what I find interesting is it says he warned them. Now usually when you warn someone of something, you're suggesting there are consequences that you will face if you disobey this warning.

And it's not that he requested of them not to make him known, he warned them not to do so. And of course we're left to guess because we're not told what the warning really involved, what consequence would come upon them if they did disobey him in this matter. We simply can't answer that because the Bible doesn't give enough information.

But one thing that's interesting is people have often asked, why did Jesus always tell people not to tell anyone about their healing? And how in the world could some people be expected to obey this? For example, when Jesus heals a blind man and says, now don't tell anyone about this. Well how could it be expected that people who knew him, here he'd been blind and now he's walking around with full eyesight, how could anyone, how could he not tell people what happened? People are going to say, whoa, what happened to you? How come you can see? Aren't you the blind man? And you know, what did Jesus really mean when he said don't tell anyone about this? And it's really hard to know. In one case, one interpretation could be that he meant not to expose him to his critics, as it were.

There were, in this case it says he warned them not to make him known. It's worded a little differently than usual. Usually he says don't tell anyone about this, meaning about the healing.

But here the warning is not to make him known. Now obviously there comes a time when we are to make Christ known, but there were times when he did not want the publicity. And no doubt this was because we read two verses earlier that there were people out to destroy him.

And these people tended to get angrier and more threatened the more popular Jesus was. And he was not trying to bring things to a head prematurely, I think, as far as the conflict that would eventually lead to his being crucified. And if his enemies were to be continually hearing about the wonderful things he was doing, I think Jesus assumed this would cause them to get only angrier and more frustrated and more desperate and maybe more urgent about getting rid of him.

And so perhaps this is why he didn't want his reputation being spread so greatly. On the

other hand, what were they supposed to say? If someone said, well, how did you get healed? Are they not supposed to say, well, Jesus did it? It's possible that when he says not to make him known, that he means that in a relative sense. That it's not so much that they're not allowed to tell anyone, like their family, for example, or their friends, but rather that they're not supposed to go out and broadcast this a great deal and make a big scene about it.

And especially in the presence of people who might turn against him for it. I'm only guessing, because there is so little said that there are several possible ways to understand his motive and his meaning. But we do find it again and again that he discouraged people from making him known.

Now that doesn't mean that you today should not make him known. It certainly doesn't mean that if he heals you, you're not allowed to tell anyone about it. Because remember when Jesus went up on the Mount of Transfiguration with his disciples, when they were coming down, he told them, don't tell anyone about this vision that you've seen until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.

In other words, there was a time during which he did not want them to report it, but after that they would be permitted to report it. And I think it's probably that before he died and resurrected, because of the danger to his life and those that were out to get him, he wanted to do the works of God, but he didn't necessarily want to make a huge publicity event out of it, possibly to avoid hastening the ultimate conclusion of his enemies crucifying him. But it's very hard to know for sure.

Now having spoken about Jesus doing this, and especially based upon the fact that he told people not to make him known, Matthew says he did this that it might be fulfilled which are spoken by Isaiah the prophet. Now this particular quotation that is given at length here by Matthew is from Isaiah 42 verses 1 through 4. It goes, Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom my soul is well-pleased. I will put my spirit upon him and he will declare justice to the Gentiles.

Now this of course is a place where Isaiah is speaking about the Messiah, and Matthew says this is really fulfilled in Jesus. He's the Messiah. And the quotation continues, He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.

And it's perhaps this particular line in the prophecy that Matthew is referring to when he speaks of Jesus healing people but telling them not to make him known. He's not trying to make a big scene in the streets. He's not crying out in the streets to get attention.

He's doing nothing to promote himself or his own career, his own ministry. He's not trying to get a big reputation here. It says, A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoking flax he will not quench, until he sends forth justice to victory, and in his name the Gentiles will trust.

This imagery of him not breaking a bruised reed or quenching a smoking flax, if you're not familiar, a flax would be the wick of a candle. And if the candle wick or the wick of an oil lamp, if it was smoldering, it would seem like it had just gone out or was just about to go out. And yet, you know, rather than putting it out and ending that little trail of smoke that's going up from a smoldering wick, he would not put it out.

He would not snuff it. As a matter of fact, Jesus' tendency was more to fan it back into flame, if we speak figuratively. He's talking about people here.

He's talking about the gentleness of Jesus' manner, that when he encounters broken things, or in this case broken people, or people that are just about, you know, the fire is about extinguished with them, he doesn't finish them off, as it were. He instead gently seeks to restore. And he's not a person who is harsh.

He's a person who's gentle and quiet. He's not out trying to make a big name for himself at others' expense. And so this is what Isaiah described the Messiah to be like.

The Messiah would be not raising his voice in the streets. Now, I would just point one other thing out here before we run out of time, which is going to be in just a moment. Street preaching is an interesting digression from this policy of Jesus.

I have been a street preacher before, but the time came when I began to wonder, is street preaching really biblical? Now, I'm not going to be criticizing those who do it. I'm just going to say that I used to think that street preaching was the epitome of imitation of the Apostles and Christ, until I realized that Jesus and the Apostles didn't really street preach. And that's one thing that the Prophet said he wouldn't do.

He will not lift up his voice in the streets. The Apostles did preach, of course, in the open air, and so did Jesus. But only when a crowd had already gathered and wanted to hear what they had to say.

They didn't go in the streets where no one was interested and just start screaming out the gospel. And yet some people do, and I used to do that kind of thing. But I now think that that's not really representative of Jesus' manner.

We'll read more about Jesus' manner as we continue next time.