



Taking the Long Way

*O LORD my God,
I cried to You for help, and You healed me. (Psalm 30:2)*

Recently I spent an unprecedented six weeks in the hospital, originally to be treated for the early onset of pneumonia, but then to have discovered in the course of a routine examination some more serious problems, one being colon cancer. The end of the story has a happy ending in that the cancer was caught early and medical tests indicate it is completely gone, so much so that no follow-up treatment or appointments were prescribed. During a three week period between the diagnosis of the cancer and the actual operation which was the only way to know to what extent the cancer had spread, however, I'm quite sure that at least some of the medical staff were convinced I was in some sort of denial. They tip-toed gingerly around this "devastating" news of cancer to which I never seemed to respond emotionally as most other patients apparently do. Regardless of the outcome, I was convinced I was in the Lord's hands, and I just didn't think it was time to worry and fret since we still didn't know the exact extent of the problem. Now that the ordeal is over, I simply explain that the Lord healed me and obviously wants me to stick around in this world for the time being. What is surprising to me is when a Christian looks at me funny and says, "Jesus healed you? The doctors spent six weeks on you!" Yes, Jesus healed me...He just decided to take the "long way".

I am aware of a Christian gentleman who desperately wants the gift of healing and at times is very frustrated that it has not yet come to him. There seem to be no end to such well-intentioned believers whose focus is overwhelmingly fixed exclusively on God accomplishing things supernaturally—what I call the "short way". They don't seem to want to take into account that He can also work the "long way", what Scripture describes as a "trial" or "test". Seriously, folks...Christ is the Great Physician. Do you really think I wasn't in His hands because He chose the "long way" rather than to invoke a supernatural instant healing?

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I don't deny that people still get healed the "short way" supernaturally; I even personally know a few. But whether He takes the short route in one case versus the longer one in another, it seems His goal is the same, to transform that life with a greater message and for a greater purpose.

As a teenager, our local pastor became terminally ill, and at one time I could introduce you to the doctors and nurses at the local hospital who could testify to his supernatural healing. As he began to cross over to the next life, the Lord spoke to him along some very specific lines and sent our pastor back. He subsequently experienced a very prolific ministry which resulted in hundreds if not thousands coming to the Lord. But he did not create a "healing ministry" and, to my knowledge, no one else in the course of his ministry was supernaturally healed. The message and the changed life took precedence over the healing event. There was a far greater joy that came from his experience than the miracle of the healing—it was the miracle of a changed life which in turn changed everyone else's life.

Going through that six week trial in a hospital bed is really no different than any other trial we might go through at work, school, or in the course of life in general. It's not just the fact that the Lord is working on us, but on everyone else around us as well. Job's trial wasn't solely about the Lord working on him, in reality the Lord was also testing Job's family, wife, friends, and in the end, even the accusations brought against him by Satan himself. In the course of my own six week trial I realized that by taking the "long way", the Lord could also work on the doctors, nurses, technicians and even other patients around me, not to mention my brothers and sisters in Christ who visited and prayed for me, much less my family. And I began to become conscious of the degree to which I was providing the right, visible testimony of the Lord to all these people and when I obviously was not. It was less about the medical condition of the cancer and much more about the spiritual condition of everyone involved, myself included.

Even during the ministry of Jesus' First Coming, when they didn't have the luxury of the "long way" afforded by modern medicine, Jesus did not hold a "healing crusade" but rather a "repentance crusade". The accompanying message evidenced by a changed life always had the priority. This is most evident in the healing of the ten leprous men in that the work was not defined by the miracle of a healing but the miracle of a changed life.

While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. As He entered a village, ten leproous men who stood at a distance met Him; and they raised their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

When He saw them, He said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they were going, they were cleansed. Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan.

*Then Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?" And He said to him, "Stand up and go; your faith has made you well."
(Luke 17:11-19)*

There are more than a few people, movements and organizations trying hard to reproduce miracles who would be happy to just see ten people healed like this. (I submit that because they are unable to do this legitimately, it is often faked or misrepresented as having taken place.) But for all the hoopla surrounding the so-called "signs and wonders" movement, the missing proof of their biblical authenticity is the accompanying message and changed lives. Not to mention they seem to give no regard to the possibility that the Great Physician may choose to work the "long way" in order to accomplish the greater need for spiritual change to take place in everyone involved.

What I am referring to is probably most plainly evident in Christ's healing of the paralytic. Here we can see the proper place of healing and something that has a greater priority over it.

One day He was teaching; and there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing. And some men were carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed; and they were trying to bring him in and to set him down in front of Him. But not finding any way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down through the tiles with his stretcher, into the middle of the crowd, in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, He said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you."

The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?"

But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,"—He said to the paralytic—"I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home."

Immediately he got up before them, and picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God. They were all struck with astonishment and began glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen remarkable things today." (Luke 5:17-26)

First of all, I would highlight the observation stated here, *"and the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing"*. I think this speaks volumes to those who hold healing crusades or simply want to perform a miracle. But even though this precondition was present, it's not what Jesus immediately acted upon. For Jesus the power to heal was present, but He recognized that they had brought their faith, and recognizing the greater priority and work of the Father first addressed the far greater issue, *"Friend, your sins are forgiven you"*. There was a greater work of faith which Christ first addressed.

This is a hard thing for some to grasp, but every single person Jesus personally healed eventually died. Even those He raised from the dead were only raised temporarily until they ultimately and permanently succumbed to physical death. The benefits of physical healing are only temporary while the benefits of spiritual healing are eternal. Having my sins forgiven means that regardless of whenever I should pass from this life to the next, I'm assured of going to the right place. I would much rather He take the "long way" to address my permanent spiritual condition than allow my short-term memory to lose sight of what is actually most important and rejoice only in the temporal.

Notice that in figure the healed man is told to take up his cross, a teaching of the greater importance of a changed spiritual life going forward rather than glorifying in a temporarily healed body. But also note that it was not his life alone which was changed, but those who witnessed more than just a physical healing. The body can only be temporarily sustained in the course of this life, but its healing served as visible evidence of a greater, permanent healing of what can ail us in both this life and the one to come.

Yes, the Lord healed me. In terms of the body, He took the "long way" so that everyone I came into contact with, everyone who visited me, everyone who interacted with me in

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some way, would all have the opportunity to reconcile the more important, long-term issues of their spiritual health over the physical. Like Job, the Lord's trials produced a far greater effect on everyone around him than just him alone. Unfortunately, there are a sizable number of believers who not only desire for the Lord to take the "short way" only, but actually accuse those experiencing the "long way" of having a lack of faith or else they would be instantly healed. Which way actually requires a greater faith? Which way is actually building up faith? Which way do you think He is most likely to employ with you?

In Him,

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