

## The Healer: The Doubtful

*Mark 9:14-29*

Welcome to Chapel Hill. My name is Ellis and I'm the Pastor of Weekend Services. You are joining us for a really significant summer series here called 'The Healer.' Over the next six weeks, we are going to look at the healing ministry of Jesus, and ask the question, what does that mean for us today. Each week we're going to consider one way that we might be feeling about our own struggles and God's power to heal.

Perhaps you struggle with chronic illness, perhaps you feel heartbroken over something or someone, perhaps you feel oppressed on a regular basis, perhaps you are finding it hard to be persistent in asking God for healing, or perhaps you feel like you're still a work in progress and you don't know how long it will take to get there. Whatever it is, I believe Jesus has something to say to you over these next six weeks. In fact, we would love you to invite someone to join you. You'll find an invite card in your worship guide for you to give to someone who you think would benefit from coming to one of these weeks.

Today we are going to start by looking at the topic of doubt when it comes to God's healing power today. It might be okay to believe that God could heal in the past, but can he really heal people today? And what about me? Could he really heal me?

Last year was quite a year for my physical health. In the middle of the summer I began experiencing chest pains. I was with my family in a restaurant when suddenly my heart started pumping out of my chest, I started to feel like my vision was narrowing, and I began to lose touch with reality. It felt like there were sound waves pushing back and forth against my head, and I was about to pass out. I turned to Rachel and said, "I think I'm having a heart attack."

After a worrying trip to the ER, and a visit to a cardiologist, I was given the all-clear—there was nothing wrong with my heart. But, I discovered there was a significant amount wrong with my stress levels. Throughout the fall I had a persistent sore throat. Every weekend I would get up to sing and be in constant pain. Every Sunday afternoon was sheer agony. I could barely speak. This continued for several weeks as I believed it was just a cold that was hanging around. Eventually, I was diagnosed with silent acid reflux—common amongst singers in high stress environments. After a few weeks on some magic pills, all my pain was gone. Unfortunately, the literally hundreds of cough drops I had sucked on resulted in no less than 6 fillings at the beginning of this year!

I am grateful for modern medicine and its power to heal. I'm grateful to medical professionals for their commitment to helping people. And yet, today, despite the incredible advances in modern medicine, we still have sickness and disease that causes so many of us pain. Throughout my journey last year, I really wrestled with doubt about whether God could heal me. I prayed and prayed and prayed for healing, but God didn't appear to come through when I wanted him most.

The Bible consistently speaks of God's power to heal, and in particular, we see this in the life of Jesus. 25% of the accounts of Jesus' life are taken up with the healing miracles of Jesus. Matthew records that: "[Jesus] went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people." (Matthew 4:23 ESV)

But it wasn't just Jesus who healed people according to the Bible. Jesus also gave this power to his followers—his disciples. Jesus gave them his authority to heal, and Mark records that "[Jesus' disciples] cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them." (Mark 6:13 ESV)

And this healing ministry of Jesus' followers continued after Jesus ascended to heaven in the book of Acts where we read of people like Paul, who was not one of the twelve disciples having the power to heal people. Luke, who wrote Acts says this: "God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them." (Acts 19:11–12 ESV)

And as a church, we believe that God still heals today. And you can read our beliefs about healing in more detail on our beliefs page of our website. But the bottom line is, we still believe that God heals in a miraculous way today, just as he did in the time of Jesus and his apostles. Listen to this story of a young woman from Vancouver BC that we share at Alpha. [Play video - Alpha Healing Story]

What an amazing story of healing. Yes, God does still heal today. But yet, even after hearing an amazing story like that, I am still left plagued with doubt. Yes, I believe God could heal today, but is that really going to happen in my life, or the lives of my friends. This is the very question we find a young father asking Jesus in the passage I want to focus on today.

A few weeks ago on Father's Day, Pastor Mark and I spoke about a time Jesus went up on a mountain with three of his followers. Immediately after that story in Mark 9, we find them descending the mountain to a crowd of people who were all arguing. In fact, it turns out they were arguing about why the disciples couldn't heal a young boy, who suffered from seizures. So they brought the boy to Jesus, and immediately the boy started having another seizure. Jesus, then turned to his father and said: "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." (Mark 9:21–22 ESV)

I can't imagine the struggle this father has gone through as he's watched his boy grow up and constantly experience seizures. Even to the point where at times it has been life threatening. He's probably tried everything he can to heal his son, but nothing has worked. And imagine his joy when he hears Jesus' disciples are in town. He knows they can heal people, so he brings his boy to them, but they can't heal him. Yet another failure. How long will this last? But... someone says, Jesus is here. And he's asking for your son. For a brief moment there appears to be hope. But you can sense the doubt in the father's mind just from the way he speaks to Jesus, "If you can do anything." He's not sure if this is something Jesus is going to be able to help with.

I heard the story a few weeks ago of a young boy named Jaxon Taylor in California. Take a look. [Play video - Jaxon Story Part 1]

I would imagine these parents felt just like the father in our story. It's hard to believe that anything could help at this point. Perhaps you've even been there yourself. Where you don't know if you believe God is really going to come through. And we have plenty of evidence to help us doubt. We have plenty of stories of people getting sick, begin prayed for, and still dying. Why doesn't God heal everyone?

The answer is, I don't know, and we will probably never know in this life. But we do know that one day, through the death and resurrection of Jesus we will all be healed. The Bible says that one day "[God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4 ESV)

One day, Jesus will come again to rule and reign as king on this earth, and he will make all things new and we will all be healed. But until that day, we only experience glimpses of God's kingdom coming on earth. God's kingdom rule is both now and not yet.

It's a bit like those days in early spring that we always get here in the PNW. Those days in March or April where the sun comes out and the thermometer breaks 70F. It's beautiful, but we know that it doesn't mean summer has fully come, because next week we will be back to rain and 40-50F weather. Yet, we know summer will come. On those warm spring days, summer is both now and not yet. We experience a taste of it, but we know it won't really come until later. It's now and not yet.

In the same way, one day, we will all be healed, but until that day, we only see glimpses of God's healing coming on earth. God's healing is both now and not yet. We see glimpses, but the fullness won't come until Jesus comes again. Now and not yet.

So what are we to do? How do we live in this tension between the now and not yet? Well in the story of Jesus and this young father, I believe we are offered an answer. After the father says to Jesus, "If you can do anything have compassion on us and help us," Jesus said to him, "If you can"! All things are possible for one who believes.' Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, 'I believe; help my unbelief!'" (Mark 9:23-24 ESV)

When we are faced with doubt, looming large over our situation, we have a choice to make. Are we going to give in to the fear and the hopelessness of what is in front of us? Are we going to believe that the victory has been lost? Or, are we going to believe that in spite of what our eyes can see, God is still God? That God can still do miracles? That God can still heal today? The choice we have to make is between belief and unbelief.

And the words of this young father put it so beautifully for me, "I believe; help my unbelief." He doesn't try to minimize his doubts. He is still honest about his unbelief, but instead of allowing that unbelief to rule in his heart and in his mind, he says to Jesus, "Here. You take it. Take my unbelief and make it into belief. I'm going to say with my mouth that I believe, and as I do, I'm going to trust that you, Jesus, are going to change my heart."

To overcome doubt, I wonder if we have to declare out loud what we believe in our heads, even if our hearts aren't quite there. I believe; help my unbelief.

Sometimes we have to say something with our mouth, even if our heart isn't quite there. As the story of that little boy Jaxon Taylor in California spread, some friends of his parents were particularly moved. Take a listen to what they have to say. [Play video - Jaxon Story Part 2. Musicians come out at this point.]

Sometimes we have to say it with our mouth, before we will believe it in our heart. Sometimes we have to praise God with our lips, before we see his victory in our lives. And this weekend, I want to ask you to consider what that might mean for you.

All of us struggle with things in our lives. We may not have physical maladies, it may be emotional, it may be psychological, it may be spiritual. It may be an area where we have been hurt by others actions or words. It may be an area where we are in bondage to our own behaviors. We all struggle with things. And we've probably all prayed for these things. And yet we still struggle with them.

This weekend I want you to consider doing something with me. Would you consider choosing to make a statement of belief that God can heal with your lips, before you might believe it in your hearts?

This could take a variety of forms. For some of you, maybe you just need to sing this next song as a statement of your belief. But for others, I want to give you a couple of different ways to respond.

Often, going beyond just saying something to actually physically doing something is even more powerful. If you want to make that statement in an even bolder way, I want to invite you to come forward during this next song and kneel if you are able. This kneeling is a sign of your surrender of your heart to God. To say, I believe in my head, help my unbelief in my heart.

And many of you come forward, I believe there will be some who want to receive prayer. Jesus finished this story by healing the young boy, telling his disciples that prayer was the key to boy's healing. We have a prayer team and elders who are going to be at the front and they are ready to pray. As you come down, if you want someone to pray for you, just raise up your hand. They will work their way around offering prayer to all who need it.