

When it comes to physical healing, I have some views that may be a bit more nuanced than you'll often find in a lot of other churches. This is partly due to the fact that I actually believe in the modern day work of the Holy Spirit. So I believe in healing.

I'll try to address this topic really briefly here. But know you can find more info at my blog at benfischerministrie.com.

The first thing to understand is that there is a debate in the church right now about whether the gifts of healing are still operating in the church today. Those in favor of the belief that the gifts are still operating are called continuationists (i.e. the gifts are continuing today). On the other hand, those who believe that the gifts are not operating are called cessationist (from the word to "cease").

Unfortunately, cessationists believe that the gifts of healing in the New Testament can't be operating right now because if they were, Pentecostals would be able to walk into Mercy Hospital and clear the cancer ward. But there is no indication that those in the New Testament really had the ability to do this in the first place.

Instead, quite to the contrary, the gospel of Mark gives us a story in which Jesus actually couldn't heal people in his own home town due to their unbelief. (See Mk 6:5) So obviously, if unbelief could prevent Jesus from healing sick people in Nazareth in the first century, then Jesus couldn't necessarily walk into a cancer ward and clear it today.

This reveals an important point which I think is critical for us to keep in mind; namely, that there is a difference between the creation miracles in Genesis 1 and the gospel miracles in the New Testament. So what's the difference?

Well, in the case of the creation miracles in Genesis 1, we see that God spoke and then ("bang!") it happened. Conversely, in the case of the gospel miracles, we see that the New Testament describes them as grace gifts (quite literally, "Charismata" from the Greek word "charis").

Now we already know that, biblically speaking, there is only one way to get grace (charis) from God. We need to put faith in God. Therefore, as we put our faith and trust in Jesus, the gifts of the gospel, including healing, manifest to us.

This helps us see why Pentecostals won't necessarily be able to clear cancer wards. It is because the gifts of healing operate imperfectly. As many of us already know, we always walk by faith in "slightly" imperfect ways.

Perhaps the best way to explain this is to point out that there is a difference between God *giving* us the gifts of the gospel and our *receiving* the gifts of the gospel. The crucial point to grasp here is that just because God freely gives us something doesn't mean we always happily receive it. Take the gift of forgiveness for example. Sometimes we struggle to receive our forgiveness with joy because we still feel sad, heavy hearted and condemned, even though God has declared in his word that he forgives us.

In a very similar way, just because God freely gives to us healing doesn't mean we always happily receive it. Instead, sometimes we struggle to receive our healing due to the pain caused by our symptoms. So the healing doesn't show up.

Naturally, this news is not initially comforting to us because it suggests that the gifts of the gospel can be imperfectly received. It also implies that faith could have a vital role to play in whether or not we ultimately receive what we ask for from Jesus.

But rather than responding with bitter indignation, we need to appreciate the various spiritual dynamics that are at work here. So let's try to understand this conundrum by viewing it through the lens of the following parable.

Suppose that we picture your miracle as a large stone resting in the middle of a great clearing in the woods. Also, let's imagine also that your faith could be represented by a horse named Faith which has been chained to the stone in the middle of the clearing.

Next, try to imagine that standing in front of Faith some hundred paces or so away is Jesus, gently calling out to Faith to come. Finally, imagine that there's also a second horse chained to the other side of the stone and that horse's name is Unbelief.

Given this scenario, what would happen if Jesus called out to faith, *and* Satan called out to unbelief **at the same time**? What would happen? In that case, the two horses would apply an equal amount of force to both sides of the stone representing your miracle, to the effect that the stone wouldn't move!

The only solution to the problem would therefore be that one of the horses would need to be overcome by the other. Unless this happens, the stone representing your miracle will simply remain stationary in the middle of the clearing.

For this reason, the quickest way to avoid this problem is to stop feeding oats to one of the horses. Simply put, we need to starve out our unbelief, something which Jesus instructs that we do through prayer and fasting. (See Matt 17:20-21)

The occurrence of gospel miracles therefore doesn't seem to rest wholly on the greatness of our faith. Instead, these phenomena seem to depend at times on the weakness of our unbelief as well. And the quickest way to overcome unbelief is to starve out our flesh and feed our spirit's with God's word.

At Riverview Church, our desire is to load up our teaching library with dynamo content on healing and miracles. To that end, I wrote a two part series of scholarly articles which deals with arguments against Pentecostalism. The articles are fair, and deal with this some of the most common misconceptions on healing. Reading them will give you an idea of how we see healing and miracles at Riverview Church. Enjoy!

- Article One
- Article Two