

DOCTORS CARE BUT ONLY GOD HEALS!

Today's Text: Jeremiah Chap. 46

Extracts:

The word of the Lord which came to Jeremiah the prophet against the nations, against Egypt, ... “Go up to Gilead and take balm, O virgin, the daughter of Egypt; *in vain you will use many medicines; you shall not be cured*” [Jer. 46: 1, 2a, 11]

Clair B. King, M.D., is an ophthalmologist on the staff of the 750-bed Aulthman Hospital in Canton, Ohio, USA.¹ In August 1953, five-year-old Robert Kasner was brought for treatment of an injured eye. The cornea had been slashed by a piece of flying glass with clear liquid in the front chamber of the eye drained out, and the iris protruding from the laceration. An emergency surgery was done to reset the iris in its proper position and a patch was placed over the wound. When Robert was brought twelve days later (on a Saturday) to remove the dressing, the doctors discovered that the surgery needed to be repeated because the iris was protruding again. A new appointment was fixed for the following Tuesday (three days later) but Robert's parents were allowed to take him home. However, on that fateful Tuesday, when he was on the operating table being prepared for surgery, the doctors were surprised to find the injured eye completely healed! The surgical staff was dismissed and the boy was discharged!

What made the difference in just three days that could not happen twelve days earlier? Robert's parents testified that they had taken their son to church on Sunday, and during a miracle service, prayer was offered for his healing. Dr. King has seen so many such experiences in his long medical practice and has come to the following conclusion: “All healing comes from God- a surgeon can perform surgery, but he must wait for a higher Power to do the healing.” This position is also held by the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, LUTH (Nigeria) which has the following motto: “We care, God heals.”

In today's lesson, God told the nations, “In vain you will use many medicines; you shall not be cured” [Jer. 46: 11]. If God alone heals, what do the doctors and hospitals do? Is there any link between medicine and faith healing? At what point do we give up medications and go for prayers? Those and more are the issues that we shall address in today's study.

¹ Story based on the personal testimony of Dr. Clair B. King, “Ours’ Not to Reason Why,” www.freewebs.com/walkingpreacher/oursnottoreasonwhy.html

1. Healing: through doctors or pastors?

Most homes I know of have a first-aid box even if they may not call it one. Somewhere in the house, you may have an assortment of medications and vitamin supplements. Without thinking about it, you may reach for analgesics when you have pain or sedatives so as to facilitate a sound sleep. However, there may be occasions when you forgo the ‘first-aid’ kit and go to the hospital to see a doctor. Sometimes, you may be referred by your regular doctor to a specialist. Sometimes, you may be required to be hospitalized. In all those cases, you were looking for healing, that is, *the restoration of health*. Did you take the medications, OTC (over the counter) or prescribed, because they could restore your health or because *you believed* that they could heal you? Where does healing come from?

In the last chapter of the book of Revelation, John described what he had been shown of the new paradise. Proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb was a pure river of water of life. In the midst of the street, on either side of the river was the tree of life that bore twelve fruits, one per month, and “*the leaves were for the healing of the nations*” [Rev. 22: 1-2]. The tree of life was also in the midst of the Garden of Eden [Gen. 2: 9]. What does this “tree of life” represent? We can see it in two ways: literally or symbolically.

In the literal ordinary meaning, the tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations can be seen as *the medical approach*. Medications come mainly from plants. God gave human beings dominion “over all the earth” [Gen. 1: 26], which includes the trees. For example, soon after God had taken the children of Israel through the Red Sea, they became thirsty. They could not drink the waters of Marah because they were bitter. Moses cried to God on behalf of the people and the Lord showed him a tree. Moses cast a piece of the tree into the bitter waters and they became sweet. There, the Lord made a statute with the people and said to them, “If you will diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God, . . . I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. *For I am the Lord who heals you*” [Ex. 15: 22-26]. When King Hezekiah was sick, the prophet Isaiah sent to him, saying, “Let them take a lump of figs and apply it as a poultice on the boil, and he shall recover” [Is. 38: 21]. The healing is not the substance applied but the power of God behind it for, as God Himself told Moses, “I am the Lord who heals you.” Therefore, modern advances in medical care are in line with God’s healing plan for us.

The use of medical doctors is well documented in the Scriptures. For example, Jeremiah asked the backslidden people of Judah, “Is there no balm in Gilead, is there no *physician* there? Why then is there no recovery for the health of the daughter of my people?” [Jer. 8: 22]. In response to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, Jesus replied, “Those who are well have no need of a *physician*, but those who are sick” [Matt. 9: 12]. The woman with the issue of blood for over twelve years “had suffered many things from *many physicians*” before she came

to Jesus [Mk 5: 25, 26]. Luke, Paul's traveling companion was referred to as "the beloved *physician*" [Col. 4: 14]. Therefore, medical doctors and hospitals play a significant role in healing. God has given them the leaves of the tree of life that He has empowered as the healing for those who are sick.

The tree of life can also be seen symbolically. The tree of life shown to John was watered by the pure river flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb [Rev. 22: 1]. Writing on the vicarious suffering of Christ for our sins, Peter speaks of Him "who Himself bore our sins in His own body *on the tree* , that we having died to sins, might live for righteousness- *by whose stripes you were healed*" [1 Pet. 2: 24. See also Is. 53: 5]. Thus, the tree of life represents Christ the great Healer who during His earthly ministry "healed *all* who were sick" [Matt. 8: 16]. *Therefore, it is not hospitals (where doctors work) or the churches (where prayers are mostly offered) that produce healing but the Lord the Healer who backs up their human effort.*

The next question, then, is to determine where to go for healing: the hospital or the church? In the words of Jesus quoted earlier, it is the sick who need a physician [Matt. 9: 12]. The word of God also says, "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick" [Jam. 5: 14, 15]. So the believer is given two avenues where s(he) can receive healing, namely, through the hospital and/or through the church. To guide us in how to use both channels profitably for our health, let us first examine the text for today's study.

2. But hospitals and churches can fail!

God spoke to the nations of Jeremiah's time, especially Egypt, saying, "Go up to Gilead and take balm, O virgin, the daughter of Egypt; *in vain you will use many medicines; you shall not be cured*" [Jer. 46: 11]. Gilead was the region east of the Jordan River, now part of modern Syria and Jordan. In those days, Ishmaelite traders from Gilead traded with Egypt in spices, balm and myrrh [Gen. 37: 25]. Balm is an ointment or cream with medicinal values. The balm of Gilead appeared to have been special because, when the prophet Jeremiah heard of the calamities that had befallen the people on account of their rejecting God's correction, he asked, "Is there no balm in Gilead, is there no physician there? Why then is there no recovery for the health of the daughter of my people?" [Jer. 8: 22]. Apparently, because of the efficacy of the balm of Gilead, the Egyptians (and in deed the Gentile nations of the world) saw it as the cure for all their ailments. But God told them through the prophet Jeremiah that even if they were to rub the balm of Gilead all over their bodies, it would not work because they would not be cured. That was because they had trusted in their idols and their kings, instead of in God [v. 25], the only true healer.

The forgoing points us to some important implications of ill-health, some of which are as follows:

a) *Ill-health is more than physical*

Most times when we go to the doctor, investigations centre on physical examination. Therefore, the outcome can only address what can be proved empirically. Yet, the word of God says, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and *be in health, just as your soul prospers*” [3 Jn 2]. In other words, the health of the body derives from the health of the soul. Take the case of the man at the pool of Bethesda who had been paralyzed for 38 years. Jesus healed him. Later, when Jesus found the man in the temple, He told him, “See, you have been made well. *Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you*” [Jn 5: 14]. In that case, the man’s physical illness was associated with sin. Most HIV/AIDS infections are associated with promiscuity and marital infidelity.

In some cases, the ill-health may have nothing to do with sin but spiritual trials and tribulations. For example, if doctors had examined Job’s boils, they might have prescribed the best treatment which would not have worked because his illness was the work of Satan who was trying to make Job lose trust in God [Job 2: 1-13].

b) *Therefore, healing is also more than physical*

Since spiritual health precedes physical wellness, it is essential to combine medical care with prayers for the best results. For example, when King Hezekiah was sick, God sent the prophet Isaiah to tell him to set his house in order because he was going to die. Hezekiah prayed for God to spare his life. God heard his prayer and sent the prophet back to tell the king that He had extended his life by fifteen years [Is. 38: 1-5]. It was after the spiritual healing that the prophet prescribed the physical treatment for the boil : a lump of figs, applied as a poultice [v. 21].

Sometimes, the medical treatment may be revealed by God Himself directly or through His messengers. For example, after God had inflicted Miriam with leprosy for conspiring with Aaron against Moses, Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, “Please, heal her, O God, I pray!” The Lord replied, “Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and afterward she may be received again” [Num. 12: 1-15]. That was how she received her healing.

I recall the experience of a family friend a few years ago who had come to the US for a knee surgery. She was a prominent business woman in Nigeria. Each time she went for pre-operative check-up, her blood pressure was discovered to be elevated whereas she never had high blood

pressure before she left home. She was placed on blood pressure lowering medications. The doctors kept postponing the surgery until the blood pressure could come down to a manageable level. Instead of coming down, the blood pressure kept going up. She had waited for over a year and her business back in Nigeria needed her personal attention. Without health insurance, her medical bills kept mounting, so was her blood pressure. Meanwhile, another family friend who is a prophet was praying for her. In a dream, the prophet was shown the name of a medication, called “Nifedipine,” which the prophet knew nothing about. She called the lady and asked her to take that name to her doctor. She did and her doctor took her off all other medications and prescribed the said medication. When she went back to her doctor a week later, the high blood pressure was down to normal range and the doctor decided to observe her for another week. The blood pressure remained normal. The knee surgery was performed and the lady returned to Nigeria after a month!

c) *When the doctor fails, only prayers will work!*

In accordance with God’s purpose, we can sometimes be healed by merely going to our first-aid box or the drug store to buy non-prescription medications. Some times, we may need to see a doctor. Some times, we may need to be hospitalized. However, a time may come when the doctor will give up because the illness is beyond medical treatment. At that stage, when all else has failed, the last resort will be prayers. This is the stage that we realize that God is in deed the healer.

Take the case of the woman with the issue of blood for twelve years. She had been to “many physicians” and “had spent *all that she had* and was no better, but grew worse.” Her situation was beyond the doctors and the hospitals. Then, she came to Jesus and, by merely touching his clothes *by faith*, she was immediately and completely healed [Mk 5: 25-29]! In another example, Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, was seriously sick [Jn 11: 1-44]. The sisters sent for Jesus to come and heal their brother but He delayed because “this sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of man may be glorified through it.” Jesus stayed away for two more days. By the time that He and His disciples arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days! Was that the failure of his doctors? Not at all. His death was to provide Jesus the opportunity to raise Lazarus from the dead and thereby glorify God.

Clearly, healing is in God’s hands, but the caring is in the hands of the doctors and the pastors.

3. Conclusion: Learn how to care!

The balm of Gilead did not cure the ailments of the Gentile nations because of their sins. Sin is to the soul as sickness is to the body. Therefore, we can learn a few skills from the way that hospitals take care of the sick to fix our relationship with God so that we can be in full health as our souls prosper. Here they are:

- Maintain a clean environment

The cleanest place for your health is the hospital. There, they are meticulous about everything, such as maintaining practices that promote good health. The whole atmosphere of the hospital is a deliberate effort to promote a healthy environment like updating the quality of staff and infrastructure. For example, health workers wear gowns, gloves, shoe covers and face masks to enter operating theatres and specialized units. Regular visits are made by health authorities to ensure compliance with safety and health standards, and the slightest deviation from the norm is visited with serious sanctions. For example, the King/Drew Medical Center in Los Angeles is on the verge of losing Federal funding to the tune of \$200 million (half of its annual budget) because it failed to meet minimum standards in 9 of 23 areas, such as shortage of qualified staff and failure to upgrade infrastructure.²

Do you pay as much attention to your soul? When last did you sanitize your relationship with God through confession of your sins and daily seeking close fellowship with Jesus? No doctor can do that for you!

Just as you will not like to go to a dirty and poorly run hospital or an incompetent doctor, do not go to a house of prayer which is not Spirit-filled. Otherwise, you could make your situation worse!

- Seek divine guidance at all times

Even when you are heading for the hospital, make sure that you seek divine guidance. No doctor will treat you without a diagnosis of your ailment. Since only God knows what is wrong with you, your medical bills can be lower if you learn to start with Him by prayer and fasting. God can put His angels in charge of the doctors handling your treatment.

When you are sick, go to the doctors because it is God who gave them the gifts of healing [1 Cor. 12: 9]. However, always remember that they cannot do more than care. Only God heals.

² Charles Ornstein, et al, "King/Drew Fallout is keenly felt," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 Sept. 2006, www.latimes.com