



Weekly Bible Study Resources

Excerpts from *The Great Physician*
For study related to the Bible Lesson August 1 - 7, 2011

Introductory Note – *The Great Physician, Vols 1 & 2* were written by Vinton Dearing, a Christian Scientist, who was Professor of English at UCLA where he taught the English Bible as Literature for forty years. The book is a composite translation of the four Gospels, organized by event rather than book, and includes a commentary. Because of the composite nature of the translation and commentary, the excerpts below may cover more topics than the citation in the Lesson. These excerpts have been compiled by Doug McCormick. A paperback book with both volumes in one binding is available for purchase at vintondearing.com.

GT – (John 6:63)

THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:22-71

Meanwhile, says John, “On the next day the crowd [that was] standing [about] on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there except one and that Jesus did not go into the ship with his students but only his students went off. But boats from Tiberias came near the place where they ate the bread after the Lord gave thanks. So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his students, they got into the boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. And when they found him on the other side of the sea they said to him, ‘Rabbi, when did you come here?’

“Jesus said to them in reply, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you don’t seek me because you saw signs [and understood them as proof of my teaching] but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. [From these words we see that the people did not know how they had been fed.] Don’t work for the food that is lost but for the food that remains [and brings you] into eternal life, which the Son of man will give you. For God the Father has set His seal on him [that is, marked him for His own].’

“[Jesus’ listeners recognized that he was speaking of his teaching.] So they said to him, ‘What shall we do to work God’s works?’

“Jesus said to them in reply, ‘This is God’s [only, or whole] work, to trust in him whom He sent.’

“So they said to him, ‘So what sign do you produce, so that we’ll see [it] and trust you? What [miracle] do you work? [We trust Moses because through his intercession with God] our ancestors ate manna in the desert, just as it’s been written, “He gave them bread from heaven to eat.” [More evidence that the people did not know how they had been fed.]’”

The quotation is from Psalm 78:24 at the end of a passage in which the Psalmist says that in spite of receiving manna and many other blessings from heaven the people refused to do God’s work. The whole Psalm is a lengthy review of the history of Israel from the exodus to the reign of David, the point of which is that disobedience to God brings disaster. Jesus’ questioners may also, then, have been asking him, if history has its lessons, why was no obedience found among

the people until David? What it is that can make people love to do God's will? Paul was to define the necessary impulse as trust or trustworthiness and said Jesus made it possible. In so saying, of course, he was echoing Jesus himself, who, John now tells us, answered his questioners by enlarging on what he had said before.¹²

“So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, Moses hasn’t given you [true] bread from heaven [manna was not spiritual food], but my Father gives you true bread from heaven. For God’s bread is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’

“So they said to him, ‘Lord, always give us this bread.’

“Jesus said to them, ‘I’m the bread of life. He who comes to me [the eternal Christ] won’t ever hunger and he who trusts in me won’t ever thirst. But I said to you that you’ve seen me indeed and you don’t trust. Everything the Father gives me will come to me, and he who comes to me I won’t throw out, because I’ve come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of Him who sent me. And this is the will of Him who sent me, that everything of what He’s given me I shall not lose, but shall raise it up in the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone seeing the Son and trusting in him has eternal life, and I’ll raise him up in the last day.’”

Most Christians understand the “last day” to be judgment day, and “raising up” to be resurrection to eternal life. Those familiar with spiritual healing as I have defined it also look forward to a final triumph over all sin, but see every day as judgment day in their individual battles with a sense of sin and “raising up” as accumulating with every victory, for the principles of this spiritual healing require moral progress, and the healings promote it.

“So the Jews [Judeans, who had come to Galilee to examine his teaching] were grumbling about him, because he said, ‘I’m the bread that came down from heaven,’ and they were saying, ‘Isn’t this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say “I’ve come down from heaven?”’ [Should we doubt the tradition that Mary had lived in Jerusalem, we may suppose that family visits to the city at festival times had made her and Joseph known there.]

“Jesus said to them in reply, ‘Don’t grumble to one another. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me will draw him [to me], and I’ll raise him up in the last day. It’s been written in the Prophets, “And all shall be taught by God” [Isaiah 54:13]. Everyone who heard [messages] from the Father and learned [from them], comes to me. Not that anyone has seen [understood] the Father except him who is with God; he has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who trusts has eternal life.’¹³

“I’m the life-giving bread. Your ancestors ate manna in the desert, and they died. “Bread that comes down from heaven” has this quality: a person will eat of it and not die. I’m the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone will eat of this bread he’ll live forever. And the bread that I’ll give for the life of the world is my flesh.’

“So the Jews were fighting with each other, saying, ‘How can this [man] give us his flesh to eat?’

“So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, if you won’t eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you don’t have life in yourselves. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I’ll raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live through the Father, even so he who eats me, he indeed will live through me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not just as [your]

ancestors ate and died. He who eats this bread will live forever.’

“He said these [things] teaching in [the] synagogue in Capernaum.

“So many of his students who heard said, “This is a hard word. Who can hear it?” For not only were the Jews not cannibals but the Law of Moses repeatedly forbids the eating of animal blood, starting with a prohibition God gave to Noah. The two times that reasons were appended, the fact that blood was the animal’s life was cited, and that may have been what Jesus had in mind: his blood was his life and the inspiration that flows from it. The people who absorbed Jesus’ teaching and lived a life as much like his as they could “ate his flesh and drank his blood.”¹⁴

Continuing with John. “But Jesus, knowing in himself that his students are grumbling about this, said to them, This shocks you, does it? So, I vow that you’re seeing the Son of man going up where he was before. The Spirit’s the life-maker, the flesh does no good. The sayings that I’ve spoken to you are Spirit and are Life [that is, they are not merely about God, they are God’s own words]. But there are some of you who don’t trust.’ (For Jesus knew from the beginning that there are some who distrust, and that there is one who will give him away.) And he was saying, ‘This is why I’ve said to you that no one can come to me unless it’s been given to him from the Father [unless he is spiritually minded, or, as Paul was later to say, he has the mind of Christ].’¹⁵

“From this [time] many of his students drew back and were no longer walking with him.”¹⁶

“So Jesus said to the twelve, ‘You don’t intend to go too, do you?’

“Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You’ve the sayings of eternal life. And we’ve trusted and understood that you’re the Holy [One] of God.’

“Jesus answered them, ‘[Not all of you.] I chose you twelve [the most spiritually-minded of men], didn’t I, and one of you is a devil [has caught the contagion of evil’s hatred of the truth].’ But he was speaking of Judas [the son] of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to give him away.” We have here another example of Jesus’ mind reading, but not, I believe, of foreknowledge. Instead, I believe that at this time Jesus was still striving to save Judas, for he was shortly to call Peter “Satan” and yet at their last supper together he told Peter that he had prayed for him and expected him to trust and to strengthen his companions, at which time he had concluded that he could do no more for Judas except forgive him.¹⁷

Footnotes

12. Romans 3:9-31, ch. 5, ch. 8, 10:6-9.

13. The words I have translated “with God” are *para tou theou*, usually translated “from God,” a possible but quite a different meaning. The basic meaning of *para* is “near.”

14. Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 7:26-27; 17:10-14; 19:26; Deuteronomy 12:16, 23; 15:23.

15. The words I have translated “there are some who distrust, and . . . there is one who will give him away” are *tines eisin hoi mê pisteuontes kai tis estin o paradôsôn auton*. I have differed from the standard accentuation of *tines* and *tis*, preferring no accent, in which case the words mean “some” and “one,” to an accent on the first syllable, in which case they would mean “who,” giving “who they are who distrust” and “who it is who will give him away.” The early manuscripts have no accents. Paul: I Corinthians 2:16.

16. “From this [time]”: *ek toutou*, which might be translated “for this [reason].”

17. Jesus calls Peter “Satan”: Matthew 16:23. Prays for him: Luke 22:31-32.

SECTION III – B8 (John 3:1-8)

NICODEMUS

John 3:1-21

Continuing with John. “There was a man of the Pharisees, Nicodemus by name, a ruler of [person of authority among] the Jews. He came to him [Jesus] by night, and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you come from God [as] a teacher, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God’s with him.’³⁴

“Jesus said to him in reply, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one will be born again he can’t see the kingdom of God.’

“Nicodemus says to him, ‘How can a person who’s an old man [like myself] be born? He can’t go into his mother’s womb a second time and be born, can he?’

“Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one will be born [not of water and dust or clay but] of water [teaching] and Spirit he can’t enter into the kingdom of God. What has been born of flesh is fleshly and what has been born of Spirit is spiritual. Don’t be amazed because I said to you, “You [people] must be born again.” The wind blows where it intends, and you hear its voice, but you [Nicodemus] don’t know where it comes from and where it goes. It’s the same with everyone who has been born of Spirit.” **In other words, material life has some awareness of the presence and work of Spirit but does not understand its source and purpose.**³⁵

“Nicodemus said to him in reply, ‘How can these [things] be?’

“Jesus said to him in reply, ‘Are you a teacher of Israel and don’t know these [things]? Truly, truly, I say to you that we speak what we know and testify to what we’ve seen, and you [people] don’t receive our testimony. If I said earthly [things] to you [people, that is, compared the divine Spirit to the wind] and you [people] don’t trust [me], how will you [people] trust if I were to say heavenly [things, that is, as Paul put it, to “compare spiritual things with spiritual”]?’³⁶

“And no one has gone up into heaven except him who came down from heaven, the Son of man. And just as Moses lifted up the [brass] serpent [on a pole] in the desert [and those who saw it were healed of poisonous snake bites], so the Son of man must be lifted up, so that everyone who trusts may have eternal life in him [the Son].”³⁷

Jesus’ words, “no one has gone up into heaven except . . . the Son of man,” appear to be contradicted by his later speaking of Abraham in heaven. Should we assume that he had second thoughts, or should we understand his words here differently? We may note that many manuscripts and hence the King James Version have “the Son of man who is in heaven.” Also, some of the committee which prepared the Bible Societies’ Greek text felt that this more common reading was correct. If so, then those familiar with spiritual healing are justified in saying that Jesus was here speaking of his true spiritual nature or conscious being, which never left the presence of God and is ever with man, though the man Jesus appeared on and disappeared from earth. Such an interpretation fits Jesus’ words to his apostles at the end of Matthew, “I’m with you always.” We can understand Jesus’ words here then not as separating between the Son of God and other sons and daughters of God but between true spiritual being and seeming earthly being. As Paul put it, “flesh and blood cannot inherit [or, possess] the kingdom of God.”³⁸

Jesus’ words, “the Son of man must be lifted up,” are the first occurrence of an important theme in John’s Gospel (and in his only). It occurs twice more, in chapters 8 and 12. It is quite

common for Christians to interpret these words and a later statement in chapter 3, “God . . . gave [the world] His only-begotten Son,” as referring to his crucifixion. We saw in the last chapter that Nicodemus may have known a spiritual interpretation of how the serpent lifted up by Moses brought healing: “Did the serpent keep alive? No; when Israel turned their thoughts above and subjected their hearts to their Father in heaven they were healed.” Jesus may then have meant that contemplation of what his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension proved about God and man would lift his followers’ thoughts above, and subject their hearts to their Father in heaven, the source of eternal life.³⁹

The word I have translated “be lifted up” may also mean “be exalted” or “be recognized for what he is” — indeed, it may have all three meanings at once. The New Testament never says in so many words what Jesus did to bring salvation, and neither does any creed adopted by the Christian church as a whole. Believers may therefore decide for themselves which views they will adopt.

The fact that spiritual healing continues today suggests that Jesus’ example in his life is not much less and perhaps no less important than his death for bringing salvation. As Paul wrote in Romans 5:10, “If, being enemies [of God], we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, by so much the more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his [the Son’s] life.” And as we read in II Timothy 1:8-10, “God . . . saved us and called us . . . not on the basis of our works but on the basis of His own purpose and grace [free gift], given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but now manifested through the appearance of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who not only abolished death but also illuminated life and immortality through the good news [he brought].”⁴⁰

The phrase “born again” has come for many Christians to mean “saved,” in the sense that one has wholeheartedly accepted Jesus as one’s personal savior, a one-time confession of faith that will have its effect when we die and God sits in judgment on our souls. Those familiar with Christian healing as I have defined it think differently. They believe that salvation is the process of recognizing that the child of God has never been and can never be “lost.” The process is not always easy, humanly speaking, but it is part of “the strife of Truth with Falsehood” which truth must win.

The next words in John may be Jesus’, but I think they are more likely to be the author’s. If I am correct, John based what he says here on what Jesus said in Jerusalem at the end of his public ministry, so that the two passages would make another frame around the ministry.⁴¹ In any case, the words here define Jesus’ ministry: “For this is how God loved the world, namely, He gave [it] His only-begotten Son so that everyone trusting in him won’t die but has eternal life. For God didn’t send [His] Son into the world to judge the world but [to clarify what is right and what is wrong] so that the world will be saved through him. The person who trusts in him doesn’t judge himself, but the person who doesn’t trust has already [that is, automatically] judged himself, because he hasn’t trusted in the name of the only-begotten Son of God [that is, he hasn’t trusted that he himself is the Messiah’s]. And this is how he’s judged himself: the Light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness more than the Light, for their works were evil. For everyone who makes a practice of wicked [things] hates the Light and doesn’t come to the Light, so that his works won’t be punished. But the person who does the truth comes to the Light so that his works will be revealed, because they’ve been done in God.” The meaning of “in God” can be understood from some later words of Jesus, “the Son can’t do anything on his own; [he can] only [do] what he sees the Father doing. [What does this fact imply?] First, whatever He does, these [things] the Son also does in the same way.”⁴²

Footnotes

34. “Ruler”: *archôn*, a general term but here probably meaning a judge and perhaps specifically a member of the judicial council that met in Jerusalem. See Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker, s.v.
35. “Not of water and dust or clay”: my interpolation rests on passages in the Dead Sea Scrolls where we find statements that man was made of these (1QHA, cols V, IX, XX; *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, ed. Florentino García Martínez & Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar [Leiden: Brill], 1997-1998, pp. 151, 159, 193).
- “Water [teaching]”: my interpretation depends on Jesus’ words in John 7:37, “If anyone’s thirsty [for righteousness], let him come to me and let him drink [learn].” See also Jose b. Jo’ezer’s words on p. 97.
- The words I have translated “born again” may also be translated “born from above,” but, as noted in IB and NIB concerning this passage (John 3:3), “from above” and “again” are alternate meanings of the word in Greek only, not in the language Jesus would presumably have been speaking with Nicodemus. The word “of” in the phrases “born of water,” “born of flesh,” “born of Spirit,” translates the word *ek*, which means “from,” “out of.” In Hebrew and Greek the words *ruwach* and *pneuma* mean both “spirit” and “wind.” Jesus here takes advantage of the fact, just as he did in replying to requests for a sign from heaven by saying that the people interpreted signs from heaven (the sky) daily.
- What I have translated as “flesh is fleshly” and “Spirit is spiritual” are literally “flesh is flesh” and “Spirit is spirit.” I wished to avoid a possible misunderstanding of the latter words, which might be taken to mean that God and man are the same.
36. “A teacher” is literally “the teacher”; hence TEV paraphrases, “a great teacher.” Paul: I Corinthians 2:13.
37. “Gone up into heaven”: the question, “who has gone up into heaven?” is found in Proverbs 30:4, where the writer is concerned with finding wisdom, which he treats as synonymous with the knowledge of God. Moses: Numbers 21:6-9.
- The order of the phrases in the original, “he who trusts in him will have eternal life,” seems to make a sequence “trusts in him,” but this sequence occurs nowhere else in the Gospels except Mark 1:15 (what is elsewhere translated “believe in him” or “believe on him” has a different preposition in the Greek, *eis* instead of *en*), so I think that “in him” goes with what follows rather than with what precedes it. Turner similarly says that “in” here and in Mark 1:15 means “in the sphere of” (Moulton, *Grammar*, III, 263).
38. Abraham in heaven: Luke 16:22-23. Bible Society editors: Metzger, pp. 203-204 (John 3:13). “I’m with you always”: Matthew 28:20. Paul: I Corinthians 15:50.
39. See John 8:28, 12:32, and 3:16.
40. In *IDB*, I, 312a, C. L. Mitton says, “The ‘blood’ of Christ is often mentioned [in the New Testament] as of special significance. This cannot mean the physical blood, but rather the life of Christ as it is yielded up to God in complete obedience to his will.” But Mitton is not, apparently, thinking of the whole life of Jesus, for earlier he interprets Ephesians 2:13, 18; 3:12 (and other passages) to mean that Jesus’ death was a specially important part of his atonement, which others share in by faith in him. For the question of who wrote II Timothy see Chapter I, note 32.
41. John 3:16-21. Compare John 12:44-50.
42. The word I have translated “has judged himself” might be translated “has been judged”; the forms of the reflexive and the passive are the same in this instance. The words “this is how he’s judged

himself” are literally, “this is the judgment”; the word translated “punished” might be translated “revealed” or “condemned.”

“The Son can’t do anything”: John 5:19.

SECTION IV – B9 (Luke 4:14...32)

REJECTION AT NAZARETH

Luke 4:16-30

Continuing now with Luke. “And he came into Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day in his usual way and [when invited to do so] stood up to read [aloud]. And [at his request the scroll of] the book of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.”

Enough is now known about the synagogues of Jesus’ day for us to visualize this one in some detail. It was very likely in someone’s large house. If, however, it was a separate building devoted to prayer, worship, study of the Scriptures, and similar communal and private activities, then Jesus and his listeners probably entered on its south side. In any case, they sat facing Jerusalem. The biblical scrolls may have been enshrined in a niche or in something portable. In the latter case, an attendant may have brought the whole collection of scrolls to Jesus. What is shown to visitors today as the place where Jesus preached is in the crypt of the church of St. Joseph and is quite small. Nazareth was not a large place in Jesus’ day, as we have said, but even so the room in the crypt would not have contained all the inhabitants, one would think.⁶¹

Continuing with Luke. “And after he unrolled the book he found the place [Isaiah 61:1-2] where it had been written,

The Spirit of the Lord [is] upon me;
because He anointed me to bring good news to the poor,
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and sight to the blind,
to send away in release those who have been broken,
to proclaim a year of the Lord’s favor.

And after rolling up the book [and] giving [it] to the under-officer [of the synagogue], he sat down [to teach]. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture in your ears has been fulfilled.’⁶²

“And all were witnessing to him and were wondering at the words about [God’s free] gift coming from his mouth.” There are two opposite ways of understanding the preceding sentence, depending on how we interpret its first two verbs. Modern translations tend to have “were speaking well of” instead of “were witnessing to,” and thus imply that “wondering” connotes admiration. As we shall see, however, Jesus’ next words turned his listeners so violently against him that they tried to kill him. Can they have changed so quickly from adulation to attempted homicide? Must they not have inclined against him as soon as he opened his mouth? Does not the sentence mean that the listeners affirmed to one another that Jesus had said something shocking (allowing that Luke himself felt Jesus was telling the good news about God’s free gift)? To me, the answer to these three questions would be no, yes, and yes, were it not for an event in

the next year that we read about in John. In Jerusalem, Jesus convinced many of his listeners as he taught in the temple precincts, but as soon as he told them they must continue to observe his rules exactly, without addition or omission, they turned on him. Therefore Luke may be recording an earlier incident in which Jesus' listeners changed their minds about him as they heard more of what he had to say.⁶³

Continuing with Luke. "And they were saying, 'Isn't this Joseph's son?'

"And [then] he said to them, 'You'll surely speak this proverb to me, "Physician, heal yourself," [and say,] "do whatever we heard happened at Capernaum here in your hometown too [that is, give us a proof of your assertion.]"'

"And he said, 'Truly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. [You are doubting instead of trusting. The kind of proofs I give are given to those who turn to me in their need.] And in truth I say to you, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah the prophet, when the heaven was closed [that is, there was no rain] for three years and six months, so that a great famine happened in the whole land. And Elijah was sent [by God] to none of them, but into Zarephath, [a village in the area] of Sidon [in modern Lebanon], to a widow woman [who, when he told her to share her last food with him, trusted that he would come to her aid]. And many lepers were in Israel in [the days of] Elisha the prophet and none of them was cleansed [that is, healed by Elisha] except Naaman the Syrian [who came to him from Damascus, and set aside his own ideas about how the healing should be performed].'⁶⁴

"And all in the synagogue were filled with anger when they heard these things, and they got up and threw him out of the city and led him as far as a vertical face of the hill on which their city was built so as to hurl him down. [This was the first act in execution by stoning. Stones were dropped on the victim if he survived the fall.] But he passed through the midst of them and went [about his business]."⁶⁵

Where, it may be asked, were Jesus' followers? Where were the forces, or even the voices, of law and order in Nazareth? The communities of that time were even less prepared for riots than those of today. As for Jesus' followers, we may assume that they were acting as he had taught them to act, teaching which is made explicit later in the Gospels and which also explains how Jesus escaped the mob unharmed and unruffled. He told his students not to fight back, not to retaliate, but to love their enemies, a rule that in its fullest sense says we have no enemies and in its practical application works reformation in ourselves and others. He told them not to be afraid when doing so, for God already knew their needs and would take care of them. He told them that if they put his teachings into daily practice they would not be swept away by the storms of life. He told them to turn away from rejection without a backward glance except to know that the kingdom of God had always been present. He taught them how to pray effectively under every circumstance, and we may be sure that they prayed for their teacher when his life was threatened. Full and practical realization that his teachings were true was normal for Jesus, and people today who have reached out for a similar grasp of his teachings in or before a time of danger have found themselves, like him, protected and holding crime in check without any lingering trauma. In Chapter V, I give a few examples from today that have particular relevance to his crucifixion.

Footnotes

61. Synagogue design: *ABD*, VI, 253-257. The crypt: *ABD*, IV, 1050-1051; *Egeria's Travels*, p. 193, quotes a passage concerning it from Peter the Deacon, writing in 1137.

62. Scholars have pointed to the fact that having to unroll the scroll almost to its end and then roll it up

again made an impressive pause both before the reading and before the interpretation. Of course this would have been true whenever anyone gave a similar scriptural reading and interpretation, and so may not have seemed outstandingly impressive to Jesus' listeners.

63. Jesus' listeners turn on him: John 8:12-59.

64. Elijah: I Kings 17:8-24; the length of the drought would appear to have been two years and six months from the time Elijah announced that there would be no more rain until he said there would be (see *ibid.*, 17:1 and 18:1, 45), but there may have been a tradition that it had continued a year before Elijah spoke; James 5:17 also says three years and six months, but may be echoing Jesus.

Elisha: II Kings 5:1-14. Lepers were "unclean" in the language of the Bible, and were required to tear their clothes, bare their heads, cover their upper lips, and warn others by saying "unclean" when they approached, perhaps because a number of conditions that counted as "leprosy" could be hidden by their normal clothing; see Leviticus 13:45.

65. "A vertical face": literally, "an eyebrow," and so usually translated "the brow." Lachs (p. 57) says there may be no such place, Walter Grundmann found two possible places (*Der Evangelium nach Lucas [Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament]*, Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt [1961]). Anyone who visits Nazareth can see that there must have been a number of small rocky faces or steep slopes, natural or man-made, that would serve. It must be remembered that those who were to be stoned to death with due ceremony were bound and pushed off a drop of merely nine feet, stones being dropped on them only if they survived the fall (Sanhedrin, 45a [VI, 4], Soncino ed., p. 295, n. 3).

SECTION IV – B10 (Matt 12:15)

JESUS HEALS MANY

Mark 3:7-12 Matthew 12:15-21

Continuing with Mark (and Matthew): "And Jesus with his students went away to the sea [Matthew says it was because Jesus knew of the plot against him], and a great number from Galilee followed, and from Judea and from Jerusalem and from Idumea [south of the Dead Sea] and across [east of] the Jordan [that is, from the Decapolis and Perea] and around Tyre and Sidon [on the seacoast north of Galilee], a great number, hearing how many things he was doing, came to him. And he said to his students that a boat should be readied for him because of the crowd, so that they would not press against him, for he healed many and so they fell on him to take hold of him, as many as had diseases [expecting to be healed by touching him]. And the unclean spirits, when they were seeing him, were falling before him, saying with a loud voice, 'You're the Son of God.' And he was rebuking them lest they make him known."¹³⁰

Matthew does not mention the boat or the people touching Jesus or the unclean spirits. He says Jesus healed all who came to him, and, using the same words as Mark does, says Jesus "rebuked them lest they make him known." We see then that in Matthew we should give the words their alternate translation, "warned them not to make him known," and in Mark we should recognize that the words have both meanings. Jesus rebuked the demons as part of healing the demoniacs and warned the former demoniacs as well as the others who came to him to live quietly with their healings for their own good.

Matthew also finds biblical precedents for Jesus' actions more often than the other authors, and in the present instance adds that these healings were "so that the statement [that came] through Isaiah the prophet would be fulfilled that says,

Behold My child [or, servant] whom I chose,
My beloved whom My soul delights in,
I shall put My spirit on him
and he will announce justice to the [Gentile] nations.
He will not quarrel nor shout
nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.
He will not break a bruised reed,
and he will not put out smoking flax
until he will bring justice out to victory
and in his name the [Gentile] nations will hope.”

Smoking flax is presumably a smoldering lamp wick, and refusing to put it out means not crushing those who are not very enlightened.¹³¹

Matthew’s quotation of Isaiah 42:1-4 is not very exact. For example, the original ends, “The isles [or coastlines, of the Mediterranean] shall wait for his law [or teaching or Torah].” Samuel Sandmel thinks Matthew deliberately distorted the original to make God appear to be concerned for the Gentiles (“nations”) rather than the Jews. It seems to me that the original shows God’s concern for the Gentiles.¹³²

Footnotes

130. “Hearing how many things” might be translated “hearing how great things,” as in the King James Version. That those who touched Jesus expected to be healed we see from Matthew 14:36, Luke 6:19, and Matthew 9:20-22 = Mark 5:24-34 = Luke 8:43-48, the healing of a woman with a hemorrhage, to which we shall shortly come.

131. Isaiah 42:1-4. “Smoking flax” in Isaiah is translated “a dimly burning wick” in the Revised Standard Version and “a smoldering wick” in the New English Bible.

132. Sandmel, p. 57.

SECTION V – B11 (Luke 4:33-36)

A DEMONIAK HEALED

Mark 1:21-28 Luke 4:33-37

In the following incidents Mark’s order is the same as Luke’s, indicating that their order is chronological and that Matthew’s is not. Matthew does not have the first of these incidents at all.

Continuing now with Mark (and Luke): “And from the very first he was going into the synagogue on the Sabbath days and was teaching. And they were wondering at his teaching, for he was teaching them as [one] having authority, and not [citing authorities] as the scribes.

“And at the very first there was a man in their synagogue possessed by an unclean spirit, and it shouted, saying, ‘[Let us alone.] What have we to do with you, Jesus [the] Nazarene? Did you come to destroy us? I know who you are, God’s Holy [One].’”⁷³

As we shall see, when Jesus gave Peter a demonstration of God’s infinite supply, Peter was frightened of him and said, “Go away from me, because I’m a sinful man.” Jesus replied, “Don’t be afraid.” We may therefore understand that the demoniac was afraid of Jesus, for the demon’s

words “we” and “us” show that it is speaking for the demoniac.

Continuing as before. “And Jesus rebuked it, saying, ‘Be quiet, and come out of him.’

“And the unclean spirit convulsed him, and making a loud sound came out of him.

“And they were all amazed, so they discussed [the matter] with each other, saying, ‘What’s this? A new teaching, with authority, and he gives orders to the unclean spirits and they obey him.’

“And his fame went out at once everywhere into the whole surrounding region of Galilee.”

The words of those who saw the healing might be punctuated “A new teaching! He even gives orders to unclean spirits with authority.”

As we have said, it appears that those present viewed Jesus as acting primarily and legitimately to prevent further disturbance of the synagogue service, and accepted the other aspects of the healing as accidental. We shall see, however, from subsequent and similar healings, that Jesus’ primary motive was to restore the man’s mental health.

Belief in demons and formal and informal practices for driving them off are to be found long before Jesus’ time and throughout the world. Christian clergy given the special task of exorcism appear in about the year 250, and a ritual was developed for the purpose. Today, churches and individuals within them differ as to what practice is efficacious, and many Christians reject exorcism, preferring, for instance, psychotherapy or spiritual healing.

From the point of view of psychotherapy, Jesus had notable insights into mental disorders, but the accounts of his cases must either be accepted on faith or reinterpreted in accordance with a modern diagnosis of the symptoms and an estimate of how quickly psychoanalysis could remove them. In other words, if the narratives are not accepted on faith and not simply rejected, the speed of the healings must be interpreted as having been exaggerated in retelling before they were written down.

From the point of view of spiritual healing, as I use the term, what Jesus did when he “rebuked a demon” was to distinguish between the evil and the person so that the rightful character of the individual as a child of God was revealed and the baseless evil, a belief in a power apart from God, disappeared. In this healing method, which Jesus spoke of as prayer, the healer affirms the all-power and all-presence of a wholly good God, and denies that evil can have a place in the divine plan, can have any reality. A healer today might need to refresh his awareness of these principles if the case were brought suddenly to his attention, but we shall see how careful Jesus was to be always ready, always aware of his and all mankind’s inseparability from God. Hence his response could be instantaneously effective.

Prayerful separation of the evil from the individual may include a quick diagnosis without dramatizing the inner workings of the human body, and specific insistence that the accepted cause of the symptoms has no more validity than the symptoms. Taking the viewpoint of spiritual healing, however, does not require us to re-diagnose the cases of demon possession in the Gospels as cases of nervous disorder, brain damage or psychic malfunction in order to understand the healing. It is the current individual or general belief that needs to be set aside by the spiritual healer, and in Jesus’ time and place that was belief in demons. So, to use the language of the Gospels, when Jesus knew that some fear or moral deficiency had allowed the demon to enter, then he removed the fear or forgave (destroyed) the sin. We shall see him calming fear in other cases of demon possession and in a parable about demon possession teaching the necessity of moral reformation.

What else does spiritual healing see in the present narrative? In “the strife of Truth with

Falsehood,” falsehood constantly asks truth for an armistice: you let me alone and I’ll let you alone. “Let us alone; what have we to do with you?” We see also that Jesus rebuked every claim of the disorder, he was unmoved by its appearance of resistance and actuality — very likely, as I explain in the next chapter, he took it as a sign that the man was healed — and then all could see its true nonexistence, even though they might not so interpret what had happened. Thomas Chubb in the eighteenth century and a number of scholars since who suppose that the unclean spirit proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah have also supposed that his refusal to let it speak was part of a program of “messianic secrecy” either instituted by him or invented by early Christians who wished Jews to believe that Jesus had deliberately not done what Jews expected the Messiah would do. One who has had some experience with spiritual healing, however, will not suppose that Jesus hid his messiahship for some purpose of his own, but, as we have said, will understand that he refused to let the demon assert its reality.⁷⁴ To do justice to Chubb and his ilk, having abandoned belief in Satan and stopped burning witches they did not recognize that what the Bible calls Satan’s power is still something to be reckoned with. In the nineteenth century it was identified as latent malefic hypnotism and it is today denominated by the medical community as the nocebo effect.

Footnotes

73. “From the very first” and “at the very first” are both “immediately” in the original. “Let us alone” is from Luke, and while it may not be a correct translation it is not far from the mark. Luke has *ea*, which may be an imperative of the verb *eaô*, “let alone,” or may be an exclamation of some sort, the exact nature of which we can only guess at. One authority calls it “a cry of horror” (*The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1956, I, 492). “What have we to do with you?” is literally “what to us and to you?” (see note 17 above).
74. A sign that the man was healed: see pp. 341-342. Messianic secret: see Norman Perrin, “Secret, messianic,” in *IDB*, suppl. vol., pp. 798-799.