

Healing the Unhealable

**A Talk by Ron Ballard for Twelve Acres, Inc.
December 1, 2002**

Around the turn of the last century a woman who longed to be of greater use to others began the study of a new book that she found advertised in a store near where she shopped for groceries. Having limited resources she was unable to purchase the book, but each day on her daily shopping rounds she stopped in and read a few pages. The book captivated her hopes and desires for a more fulfilling life, and she would return home each day filled with eagerness and enthusiasm to share what she had learned. No one in her household, however, was particularly interested. Each afternoon she would go outside and hang up the laundry that she took in, in order to make ends meet. Next door lived a young boy who was placed outside in a playpen to take in the fresh air; he had what today would be called downs syndrome. Unable to find a willing audience inside, this woman began to share what she had learned from this book with the captive audience outside. She explained what she was learning about the nature of God and how each individual was made to express God's nature. Being a woman of rather keen intellect, she explored with this boy in some depth the nature of God, as she understood it, and how this nature had to be evidenced in his life. He just stared.

Days passed, and she had read just about this entire book when the boy's mother knocked on her door late one afternoon. She asked this woman what she had been talking about to her boy. The woman told her that she had discovered this wonderful book entitled **Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures** by a woman named Mary Baker Eddy, the discoverer of Christian Science. She told this boy's mother that she didn't know much about Christian Science, but she knew that Mary Baker Eddy was a healer and had written a book explaining to others how to heal. The mother was quiet and then said, "Well, whatever it is that you are learning from that book works, because my son is changing." In time the boy was healed, completely, of this challenge and became normal in every sense of the word. The woman, my grandmother, went on to serve humanity for the next 60 years as a Christian Science practitioner, and this was the very first experience of spiritual healing in our family.

This kind of healing experience was not uncommon in the early days of Christian Science. Local newspapers often printed accounts of wonderful healings that people experienced through their newfound study of Mary Baker Eddy's book. The turn of the century was a time of great exploration and experimentation in the health care field; one stood less than a 50/50 chance of even being helped by conventional medicine. Christian Science offered many people the only hope of being healed of the unhealable.

But these healings were not the only experiences that people had in Christian Science. Sometimes healing was delayed or protracted; sometimes it simply didn't happen. Mrs. Eddy addressed this issue in numerous places in her writings, noting in **Science and Health**, "A grain of Christian Science does wonders for mortals, so omnipotent is Truth, but more of Christian Science must be gained in order to continue in well doing." The key, it seemed, to continued successful healing lay in gaining more of Christian Science. In order to understand what that more might entail, we could look to a passage in another book of Mrs. Eddy's in which she answers the question, "If Christian Science is the same method of healing that Jesus and the apostles used, why do not its students perform as instantaneous cures as did those in the first century of the Christian era?" (**Miscellaneous Writings**, pg. 40)

Her answer:

In some instances the students of Christian Science equal the ancient prophets as healers. All true healing is governed by, and demonstrated on, the same Principle as theirs; namely, the action of the divine Spirit, through the power of Truth to destroy error, discord of whatever sort. The reason that the same results follow not in every case is that the student does not in every case possess sufficiently the Christ-spirit and its power to cast out the disease. The Founder of Christian Science teaches her students that they must possess the spirit of Truth and Love, must gain the power over sin in themselves, or they cannot be instantaneous healers.

Healing, evidently, is not merely a matter of appealing to God for help but a need for spiritual regeneration of thought and life, that is to say, the healer needs to cultivate the Christ-spirit which involves, at least in some part, gaining power over sin in oneself. Interestingly, this became a major point of contention with some of Mrs. Eddy's early followers – those who would eventually turn their attentions to a rising movement in her day called "New Thought." New Thought adherents argued that there was too much emphasis placed in Christian Science on dealing with the errors of one's thought and balked at what they saw as a Calvinist influence on redeeming one from sin. It seemed that the rigors of spiritual healing as Mrs. Eddy taught it were too much for these dabblers in spiritual healing. This emphasis on spiritual regeneration separates even today those who may be looking for a quick new age remedy from those who are dedicated to real spiritual growth through redemption of character.

To gain a more in depth look at what this might entail, I would like to turn your consideration to a passage in this seminal book on healing, **Science and Health** (pg. 242):

Self-love is more opaque than a solid body. In patient obedience to a patient God, let us labor to dissolve with the universal solvent of Love the adamant of error – self-will, self-justification, and self-love, – which wars against spirituality and is the law of sin and death.

Now talking about things like sin and self-love aren't always the most pleasing of topics. Human thought immediately gets pretty defensive and braces itself for what it assumes is going to be the inevitable onslaught of guilt and condemnation. However, it is useful to notice in this passage that the author is not attaching these errors of thought to individuals but seems to be saying that they belong to erroneous thinking itself; they are adamants of error. It would be helpful to keep in mind that individuals are more victims than a creator of sin, and true spiritual healing no more attaches sin to the individual than it attaches sickness. These adamants, therefore, are efforts of mortal thinking (that is the thought patterns of mortals) to keep one from accepting and experiencing the benefits of one's true nature as an expression of God's being. But they need to be addressed, nonetheless, and destroyed in thought in order to be free from them. They are often the errors of thought that prevent healing from taking place. An adamant is a lodestone considered to be of impenetrable hardness, and the author is telling us that the concepts of self-love are even more opaque. Gratefully we have some examples of their dissolution. Let's take a look at each one.

You may know the story in the Bible (II Kings 5) of Naaman, a valiant soldier, captain of the army of Syria, but he was a leper. In his exploits he brought back to Syria a Jewish handmaid who counseled her mistress, Naaman's wife, that Naaman should visit the prophet Elisha who could heal him of his leprosy. Naaman followed this counsel and journeyed to Samaria to seek the prophet. When he found him, Elisha sent a servant to tell Naaman that he needed to wash in the river Jordan seven times. Naaman initially rebelled at this command, feeling slighted that Elisha did not address him, so great a man, personally and then asked him to bathe in the muddy Jordan rather than in the newer rivers of Damascus. Rejecting the command, he was counseled by his servants to check his will and follow Elisha's directions. In so doing, Naaman was healed of his leprosy. How often does self-will stand in the way of healing! Sometimes we can have such a decided sense of how something must work out that we may miss the very directions that lead us to the healing. What was Naaman really healed of? Leprosy? Or the deeper moral issue of self-will? Naaman needed to submit to the will of God, represented here by the prophet; he needed to turn away from the pride of power and intellect and human reason and analysis to find the simplicity of spiritual direction, direction by God. Elisha commanded him to wash in the old river Jordan not the sparkling newer waters of Damascus. While one can appreciate the new ideas and inspiration found in secular culture and semi-metaphysical systems, the question comes down to what will heal us of our leprosy. There are beautiful ideas and concepts in all religions, but only one finally purges us of the leprosy of sin, and that is found in the old river of Biblical thought.

We must realize despite the tendency of pop culture to demand fast and easy results that spiritual healing is really about spiritual growth, redemption of character, bringing our selfhood in line with the divine nature, and no amount of fame, wealth, power, or prestige is going to accomplish that task. Like Naaman, we must be willing to seek the humility of washing in the old, tried methods of Biblical inspiration. I had a friend a number of years ago who was a pastor in a local church here in San Francisco. We met each other once and awhile down at Chrissy Field and ran along the waters edge. He had been in the ministry many years and was desperately trying to find new ways of reaching his community with the gospel message. We talked about many things on our runs, mostly theological issues, but never about healing; he simply was not interested. Then one day while running he had an asthma attack and could hardly breathe. He asked me to pray for him or run and call an ambulance. I opted to pray. I asked him if he ever thought much about the healings in the Bible; he shook his head "no." I asked him if he believed that God still healed people; he nodded "yes." I asked him if he thought the Christ could be with us right now; he nodded "yes." I asked him if Jesus were here with us did he think he would be very pleased that my minister friend had been ignoring his healing works all these years; he literally gasped and that was the end of the asthma attack. Over the coming weeks and months we had many talks about Biblical healing and what it was really meant to accomplish – purging the soul. He told me that his sermons from that time on encouraged his congregation to bathe in the old river of Jordan, the Biblical message of healing heart and soul.

Many years later after Naaman washed in Jordan, another man was sitting by other waters in hopes of healing (John 5). This fellow was waiting for the moving of the waters of Bethesda because the legend was that when the waters were troubled by an angel, the first one who jumped into these waters would be healed of whatever malady he or she had. As the story goes, this man was paralyzed in his feet, so he could not get into the waters before someone else beat him to it. He had been trying evidently for a long time. (Now I don't know about you, but I always wondered about this fellow's sense of logistics; if you had been there all that time and everyone kept beating you to the waters, don't you think you would have moved closer so at least you might fall into them if you couldn't walk?) This fellow's challenge, however, was not his lack of logistical skills. When Jesus found him, he asked a most probing question, "Wilt thou be made whole?" Now obviously if one had been in such a situation for so long (38 years) the answer would be "yes!!" But Jesus appears not to be asking, "Do you want to be healed of your paralysis;" but "Are you ready to be whole in every sense of the word?"

Be careful of the answer. It is easier to say that we want the demands of the Christ than to actually accept them. Or as Pascal once observed, "Men often mistake their imagination for their heart." Which one of us has not been down the road multiple times of professing to want to accede to the demands of the Christ only to find it too difficult to do so. And usually that's where self-justification enters. There is always some reason. For the man at the pool of Bethesda it was because he had no one to help him, there was never enough

time or opportunity to make it. How many times is too many to forgive someone else when they take advantage of us? Jesus suggests seventy times seven is not enough. When should we stop giving to others? Jesus suggests that we give not just our shirt, but our cloak also. Reading through the Sermon on the Mount will give one plenty of grist for the mill, and it is always interesting to listen to the claims of self-justification as to why something cannot be done or should be tempered as we work through that sermon.

A woman I know faced a diagnosis of irreparable failing eyesight. Many years before her family had gone to a Fourth of July fireworks display at a local park. Just as the display was set to begin, a Roman candle was ignited and unintentionally fired into the middle of her family where it exploded. She and her two children were critically injured and taken to the hospital where her son died on arrival. While neither she nor her daughter were expected to live, through the prayers of a Christian Science practitioner, they survived, although she was told that she would never see again. The healing included restoration of her sight. The man who ignited the fireworks was found to be drunk. You can imagine her feelings about this situation and this fellow. Years later when she faced again loss of sight, she realized that she had never come to grips fully with the forgiveness of this individual who had been so careless that summer evening. She realized that forgiveness was not just a matter of human effort but a divine demand. She had to see this individual as God's expression, always manifesting the divine character despite the compelling testimony of the physical picture. She had to ask herself whether she really believed that God wanted her to see this situation differently. Once she realized this was the divine demand, she could drop the self-justification that was allowing her to feel vindicated in holding on to her feelings. Letting go of the self-justification for not seeing this man as the expression of God's being let her see clearly and her sight was restored. It also healed the man at the pools of Bethesda.

Perhaps in today's psychology this woman would have been encouraged in her ill feelings about that situation, not to be too hard on herself for feeling the way that she did, and just loving herself more. There is certainly a need in many situations for loving ourselves correctly, which is loving ourselves the way that God loves us. It's the other kind of self-love that does the real damage, the kind of self-love that considers only one's own point of view, to the exclusion of others and even of God. Remember the parable of the prodigal son; it begins with "A certain man had two sons...." (Luke 15) We often forget the lessons of the son that stayed home. While his younger brother was off wasting his inheritance, he stayed and worked faithfully for his father. Or did he? This is a parable and the contrast in this parable is often thought to be between the sinners (the young son) and Pharisees (the elder son). The elder son's loyalty soon turns into jealousy of the younger son's homecoming, self-righteousness because he stayed while his brother cavorted with harlots, and self-pity because he never got a feast with his friends. How easy it is to fall into the prayer of the Pharisee, "God I thank thee that I am not as others are." The difficulty with the self-love that takes pride in how good one is compared to others is that soon the devil asks us the question, "But has it done any good, does it really pay off?" And then comes another

kind of comparison, "Look at that fellow; he certainly isn't very spiritually minded and look at his success, or wealth, or popularity, or health." We may not realize that subtle sense of self-love, but self-love it is nonetheless. The Father in this parable breaks through all this self-focus with the most tender reminder, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." We must never forget that promise.

A friend one time came to consider that promise. He was a good fellow, honest, charitable, kind. But he had more than his fair share of physical ailments. He was diabetic, subject to extreme depressions, and eventually diagnosed with blocked arteries of the heart that required immediate surgery. At this point, discouraged and desperate, he took up the study of Christian Science. A friend of his introduced him to **Science and Health** and he spent some months reading and rereading the book, all the while fending off his doctor who wanted him to schedule the life saving surgery. The study of the book strengthened his resolve to be healed through prayer, and soon he felt he was ready to talk to a Christian Science practitioner. During his consultation with the practitioner he voiced his perplexity about why he should be having all these problems. He was striving to live a good life, he said, and he knew plenty of people who weren't coming even close to being as honest and they seemed to be perfectly healthy. The practitioner shared with him the story of the "other brother who stayed home." And then they talked about the most important part of the parable, the promise, "thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." It makes no difference what someone else does or doesn't do; God is not keeping records. The unconditional Love that God is constitutes the only salient fact about the prospects for our lives. No matter how fair or unfair human experience seems to be, the only fact that counts is that all that God is, that is all the intelligence, substance, power, and life, is given to each and everyone freely. God never holds anything of its nature back; divine Love is in a constant state of giving. It makes no difference if the other guy was just hired and you've been working all day long, you both get the infinite fullness of God's being. And you can't take away anything more than that. The key is, are we receiving as openly as God is giving? When we get the adamant of self-love out of the way, we most certainly are. This fellow left the practitioners office with the assurance by the practitioner that he was healed, and while he had some initial doubts that proved to be the case. He even some time later was retested by his original physician and pronounced in good health: no more heart problem, no more diabetes, and no more depressions.

These kinds of healings are not products of a by-gone era. They are products of healing based on "old river theology," healing based on spiritual regeneration and redemption of lives. Healing the unhealable is a matter of addressing the real need in life – drawing closer to God by eliminating the mortal tendencies of thought that would keep us thinking of ourselves as mortals. Healing the unhealable is being unafraid to look error and sin fearlessly in the face and know that they are no part of us and then making sure that we live that way. I remember talking to my grandmother some years back about that early healing of the boy next door. I asked her what she thought was behind that healing; she

didn't hesitate: "It was all about discovery of God for him and for me. Learning about God was exhilarating; it was unlike anything I had ever experienced. I felt the spirit of Truth filling our conversations." And so, it must ever be.

© Ronald Ballard, CSB