



FAITH AND HEALING IN MARK 7:26-30 IN THE CONTEXT OF HEALING IN SELECTED CHURCHES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *Many Nigerian Christians believe that miracles still exist. The reality of miracles remains an issue of debate. Some scientists have rejected miracles because they cannot be proven. Many Africans accept miracles because they have faith in a miracle-working Supreme Being. Miracles occupy a singular and prominent place in religious experience throughout the world and it is often the most important thing in any given religious tradition. The paper examines the miracles of Jesus Christ in relation with selected churches during his ministry, particularly the healing of the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter in Mark 7:26-30. This study interrogates the stance of Nigerian churches on the faith role debate given the country's deeply entrenched healing on medical nature. The investigation uses interview data from members of selected churches. The paper contends the holistic process theory that has three obligatory steps: (1) to feel, (2) to understand, and (3) to let go of negative decisions. The paper concludes that faith-based healing is paramount to religious and non-religious people in Nigeria. Furthermore, the chosen churches have established the doctrine of healing among their members. Therefore, the theory for holistic healing is essential for wholesome therapy and restoration of quality life, health, and ability to adequately by patients should be entrenched into the religious fabric of the churches in Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: Faith, Healing, Churches, Medical Nature, Holistic.



INTRODUCTION

Some scientists have rejected miracles and many scholars think that the miracles attributed to Jesus Christ did not really take place because they cannot be proven. For instance, some scholars aver that the miracles were just the creation of the early church, as Omowole (2004) opined. These scholars, according to him, give reasons for the presence of miracles in the Gospels. One of such reasons is that the miracle stories were imported from the Greek milieu since miracles have the same literary form both in the Christian and Greek settings. However, it is claimed that it was the Christian heretics who used miracle stories to advertise Jesus as a miracle-working God just as disciples of great men among the Greek did in order to proclaim their masters. The writers of the Gospels did not only argue but added the miracle stories for apologetic reasons.

However, the problem with the above position is that some may not still believe in the miracles performed by Jesus Christ in his time. Furthermore, they argued that we should only be concerned with the teachings of Jesus Christ, but the New Testament scholars conclude that the Gospels cannot conclude with the exclusion of the work and miracles performed by Jesus.

Ἐκεῖθεν δὲ ἀναστὰς ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὰ ὄρια Τύρου. Καὶ εἰσελθὼν εἰς οἰκίαν οὐδένα ἤθελεν γινῶναι, καὶ οὐκ ἠδυνάσθη λαθεῖν· 25 ἀλλ' εὐθὺς ἀκούσασα γυνὴ περὶ αὐτοῦ, ἧς εἶχεν τὸ θυγάτριον αὐτῆς πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον, ἐλθοῦσα προσέπεσεν πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ· 26 ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἦν Ἑλληνίς, Συροφοινίκισσα τῷ γένει· καὶ ἠρώτα αὐτὸν ἵνα τὸ δαιμόνιον ἐκβάλη ἐκ τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτῆς. 27 καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτῇ Ἄφες πρῶτον χορτασθῆναι τὰ τέκνα· οὐ γάρ ἐστιν καλὸν λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων καὶ τοῖς κυναρίοις βαλεῖν. 28 ἡ δὲ ἀπεκρίθη καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ Ναί, Κύριε· καὶ τὰ κυνάρια ὑποκάτω τῆς τραπέζης ἐσθίουσιν ἀπὸ τῶν ψιγίων τῶν παιδίων. 29 καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ Διὰ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ὕπαγε, ἐξελήλυθεν ἐκ τῆς θυγατρὸς σου τὸ δαιμόνιον. 30 καὶ ἀπελθοῦσα εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτῆς εὔρεν τὸ παιδίον βεβλημένον ἐπὶ τὴν κλίνην καὶ τὸ δαιμόνιον ἐξεληλυθός.

24 And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know *it*: but he could not be hid. **25** For a *certain* woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet: **26** The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. **27** But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast *it* unto the dogs. **28** And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs. **29** And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter. **30** And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed.



THE HEALING OF THE SYROPHONECIAN'S DAUGHTER (MARK 7:24-30)

Miracles occupy a singular and prominent place in religious experience throughout the world and it is often the most important thing in any given religious tradition. Mabadu (1987) has it that the history of religions has preserved the record of events, actions and states taken to be so unusual, extraordinary and supernatural that the normal level of human consciousness finds them hard to rationally explain. As a matter of fact, the biblical world and the modern world are worlds apart. The one seems mythical and the other real. Owanikin (2004) opined that miracles are usually attributed to supernatural powers through which God fulfils his purpose in history and by using charismatic personalities.

The healing of Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter shows that Jesus has mercy in store for the Gentiles. The story is similar to the story of the healing of the centurion's servant in Matthew 8:13-14. They do not only possess common features, they both have the same theological purpose. Tasker (1983) posits that it is through faith in Jesus Christ that both Jews and Gentiles are admitted into the fold of God. Jesus is the giver of the messianic bread which was intended first for the children (Jews) but the dogs, i.e, the Gentiles may participate in Messianic salvation, though this privilege comes through faith alone.

The woman, according to Argyle (1963), in the story was a Greek, a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel and an alien to the covenant of promise. Mark in his own account calls her a Canaanite perhaps regarding Phoenicians of Syria as descendants of the Canaanites. She had a daughter that was possessed by a devil. She begged for mercy, "Have mercy on me Lord, Son of David." By referring to Jesus Christ as the son of David, she acknowledged him to be Messiah. But her request was met with discouragement for Jesus did not answer. Jesus was always open and attentive to the cries of poor supplicants. Verses 23-24 are peculiar to Matthew who emphasizes the limitation of Jesus' ministry to the Jews. Jesus Christ believed he was entrusted with power for his own people who must be taught first, then others.

In verse 23, the disciples begged Jesus to at least answer her and send her away so that her cries would no longer disturb them. Again, the answer to this request is discouraging. Jesus Christ had already fixed the attention of the woman on the fact that he had not been sent to non-Jews and that it would not be proper to give Israel's blessings to the children of those who do not belong to Israel (Hedriken, 1976). She responded with humility and explained why she was not prepared to accept Jesus' statement. She argued that the dogs were never denied the crumbs and they were allowed a place under the table. This means that though the primary mission of Jesus Christ was to Israel, the mission allowed others to share in Israel's blessings through faith.

Moris (1984) added that her humility made her glad about crumbs and her faith encouraged her to be hopeful. Thus, Jesus Christ commended her faith and cured the daughter. No one else received such commendation, "great is your faith" from Jesus. Though the patient was at a distance, that was no hindrance to the efficacy of Jesus' word. He spoke a word and the woman's daughter was cured.



ORTHODOX MEDICINE AND DIVINE HEALING

Orthodox medicine and divine healing should be allowed to complement each other. They should not be separated as both seek for the well-being of individuals. Akande (2004) asserts that although science tackles the manifestation and causes, divine healing on its own seeks a person's total well-being: physical, spiritual and physiological. The Bible does not condemn the use of drugs for healing. It is a part of the gifts of God. The Lord has given every good gift for the use of man, and "the knowledge of God is the beginning of science"; hence, science is in need of divine intervention in its mission, and divine healing also needs science for its fulfilment. Many functional disturbances have been associated with unconfessed guilt. Some scientists have also testified to the fact that some long-standing cases of insomnia, palpitations, headaches, disorder of the digestive organs and hypertension have disappeared all of a sudden, after confessing some wrongs. This is why divine healing adequately caters for the spiritual, mental, moral and physical well-being of man (Akande, 2004).

Theory of Holistic Healing

The process of healing seemingly takes place on two different levels in the organism. Though not completely understood, medical science has a good understanding of the local process of healing that takes place when a specific tissue or organ gets a wound (Ventegodt & Merrick, 2003). They both agreed that healing can also take place on the level of the whole organism, and this is far more mysterious. Biomedical science has been successful in explaining processes on the level of the molecule and the cell, but it has often been unsuccessful in explaining the processes at the level of the organism. It has accordingly not yet been able to explain what happens when patients spontaneously recover or heal completely even from a severe mental or somatic illness, like cancer or schizophrenia. To explain what happens on the level of the whole organism is the objective of holistic medicine (Ventegodt & Merrick, 2003)

The holistic process of healing seemed to be a complete mystery for medical science, but in the second half of the 20th century, several scientists succeeded in explaining important aspects of this complicated phenomenon. One of the most brilliant was Aaron Antonovsky (1923-94) from the Ben Gurion University in Beer-Sheva, Israel with his model for holistic healing using the famous concept of "salutogenesis" (Antonovsky, 1987), who posited the idea was to help the patient to create a "sense of coherence," an experience in the depth of life, strongly related to the concepts of meaning, understanding, and action. In recovering the sense of coherence, the patient accesses his or her hidden resources and improves quality of life, health, and ability to function at the same time.

Human existence can be interpreted as extending from the most abstract level of existence (the consciousness, the spirit, and the soul) to the most concrete level of cells, molecules, and atoms—the physical matter. Taking this as our frame of reference, we can place the phenomena body, feelings, and mind in between the abstract and the concrete level. The cells can be found between the level of matter and the level of the body. When these cells are disturbed because of "blockages", illness and suffering arises.

When man experiences unbearable emotional difficulties, these can be solved by repressing emotional pain from the surface of consciousness. This happens by making a negative decision that denies the original constructive intention, which causes the suffering. The existential pain is, together with the whole perception, turned into what is known as a gestalt (a "frozen now"),



which is from that moment found as a chronic tension in some part of the mind or the body (Dige, 2000).

PHYSICIANS AS AGENTS OF HEALING

The Bible has records of Yahweh healing through a physician. In the Old Testament, Ecclesiastes 27 verse 1 says the Lord created medicines out of the earth and men are given skill as to how to use them with a view to glorifying God's marvellous works, "with them doth he heal a man, and taketh away his prayer in healing." The Lord was regarded as the great physician. However, he bestowed the power to heal on his agents, the priests. Samuel (1978) reiterated that medicine was first developed among the ancient Egyptians in the third millennium B.C. but it was the Greeks who first established the art of healing on an empirical and rational foundation. Physicians were highly valued before, during and after the intertestamental period. Samuel (1978) added that in spite of the mixture of medicine and magic in the treatment of some illnesses, the role of physicians in applying medical objects in healing could not be overlooked. Despite the use of medicine by physicians, there flourished beliefs in superstition and religion.

Josephus indicated that the Essenes were expert healers of souls and bodies. According to Philo, the name Essenes signifies "healers", he opined that the Aramaic root "asya" means a person who heals "wounds of wickedness and extirpates the seats of evil, and offers to God truly spiritual worship. We have so far examined the healing processes in the intertestamental period. The writer was able to discover that the healing process was not only Spiritual (Prayer) but also discovered through physicians.

HEALING IN SELECTED CHURCHES IN NIGERIA

The Christ Apostolic Church is one of the Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria. Akintude (2004) opined that the Church is renowned for the belief in miracles and healing through prayers and the use of water. Hence, the reference to the denomination as "Ijo Olomi-Iye" or "Ijo Olomitutu" at inception. The Church has various records of miraculous healing (Odetola, 1992). One of the Church's publications contains the records of the lame being healed, the blind receiving their sight, etc. Another case is the Methodist Church, Nigeria where the Church believes in holistic healing. Ereko Methodist Church has a clinic where members go for check-up after the Church service even after the prayers would have been said to verify that the body has received complete healing. The writer has attended services at Mountain of Power and Healing Ministry and noticed that even after much prayer on the sick person and even when deliverance has been conducted, the Church allows the person concerned to go and check at the hospital to confirm that the healing is complete.



RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

Faith and healing in Nigerian Churches is becoming increasingly popular, perhaps because of the growing challenges being faced in all aspects of our national life: economic, social, financial, medical and spiritual. Faith and healing have become more significant as they now provide solace and give meaning to the lives of many despondent and despairing ones in the face of adversities. Total health and well-being remain one sure way of proving to the world that the God of Christianity is real and it does not go against taking medications when someone is sick, even though faith is still essential when the sick person goes to the clinic. In this paper, we have tried to show that faith and healing work together. We established this through our discussion on the aspects of the stories of the healing of the Syro-Phonician woman; despite Jesus' discriminatory response to the woman, her stubborn faith helped her and Jesus eventually healed her daughter. Secondly, some of the instances cited in the work from various Churches in Nigeria have shown that Churches in Nigeria have a lot of regards for medicine that even when someone testifies that God has healed him or her, the Church will still ask the person to go and confirm in the hospital for wholistic healing and this is very similar to Jesus' attitude in the Bible time when he would ask the sick to go and show their body to Priest because the priest in the Bible time performed many roles.

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