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JESUS AND THE MULTITUDES

A well-known collection of records begins with these words:

Here they are! The largest, the longest, the deepest, the highest, the fastest, the fattest, the oldest, the newest, the most startling ... the most spectacular ... the most incredible ... packed with fantastic facts and fully documented fascinating figures ... here it is.¹

What book is it? The *Guinness Book of World Records*. Believe it or not, an introduction to Christ's healing ministry reads with even greater superlatives:

There are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written (John 21:25).

Webster's *New International Dictionary* defines *unique* as 'being without a like or equal; single in kind or excellence.' No other word so accurately portrays Christ's healing miracles. At no other time in human history have so many people been healed from such a multitude of diseases in so short a time as during Christ's three-year public ministry. History has not repeated itself. Christ's truly unique healing ministry remains unequaled. It is no wonder that the Jews marveled at Jesus' healing ministry for, 'nothing like this was ever seen in Israel' (Matt. 9:33; *see also* Mark 2:12; Luke 10:24; John 9:32). Look at the following accounts for yourself; I think you will agree.

THE HEALING MINISTRY OF GOD THROUGH JESUS²

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
1. Multitudes	<u>4:23-24</u>	<u>1:39</u>	—	—
2. Leper	<u>8:2-3</u>	<u>1:40-42</u>	<u>5:12-13</u>	—
3. Slave	<u>8:5-13</u>	—	<u>7:2-10</u>	—
4. Woman	<u>8:14-15</u>	<u>1:30-31</u>	<u>4:38-39</u>	—
5. Multitudes	<u>8:16-17</u>	<u>1:32-34</u>	<u>4:40-41</u>	—

¹ Norris McWhirter and Ross McWhirter, *Guinness Book of World Records* (New York: Bantam, 1977), 1.

This chart conforms to the synoptic chronology according to Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979).

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6. Demoniac	<u>8:28-34</u>	<u>5:1-20</u>	<u>8:26-39</u>	—
7. Paralyzed man	<u>9:1-8</u>	<u>2:1-12</u>	<u>5:17-26</u>	—
8. Little girl	<u>9:18-19, 23-26</u>	<u>5:21-23, 35-43</u>	<u>8:40-42, 49-56</u>	—
9. Woman	<u>9:20-22</u>	<u>5:24-34</u>	<u>8:43-48</u>	—
10. Blind Man	<u>9:27-31</u>	—	—	—
11. Demoniac	<u>9:32-34</u>	—	—	—
12. Multitudes	<u>9:35</u>	—	—	—
13. Multitudes	<u>11:2-5</u>	—	<u>7:18-22</u>	—
14. Man	<u>12:9-14</u>	<u>3:1-6</u>	<u>6:6-11</u>	—
15. Multitudes	<u>12:15-21</u>	<u>3:7-12</u>	—	—
16. Demoniac	<u>12:22-23</u>	—	—	—
17. A few people	<u>13:54-58</u>	<u>6:1-6</u>	—	—
18. Multitudes	<u>14:13-14</u>	—	<u>9:10-11</u>	<u>6:1-3</u>
19. Multitudes	<u>14:34-36</u>	<u>6:53-56</u>	—	—
20. Gentile girl	<u>15:21-28</u>	<u>7:24-30</u>	—	—
21. Multitudes	<u>15:29-31</u>	—	—	—
22. Demoniac boy	<u>17:14-21</u>	<u>9:14-29</u>	<u>9:37-43</u>	—
23. Multitudes	<u>19:2</u>	—	—	—
24. Blind men	<u>20:29-34</u>	<u>10:46-52</u>	<u>18:35-43</u>	—
25. Blind/lame	<u>21:14</u>	—	—	—
26. Demoniac	—	<u>1:21-28</u>	<u>4:31-37</u>	—
27. Deaf man	—	<u>7:32-37</u>	—	—
28. Blind man	—	<u>8:22-26</u>	—	—

29. Multitudes	—	—	<u>5:15</u>	—
30. Multitudes	—	—	<u>6:17–19</u>	—
31. Widow's son	—	—	<u>7:11–17</u>	—
32. Women	—	—	<u>8:2</u>	—
33. Demoniac	—	—	<u>11:14</u>	—
34. Woman	—	—	<u>13:10–13</u>	—
35. Man	—	—	<u>14:1–4</u>	—
36. Ten lepers	—	—	<u>17:11–21</u>	—
37. Man's ear	—	—	<u>22:50–51</u>	—
38. Man's son	—	—	—	<u>4:46–54</u>
39. Lame man	—	—	—	<u>5:1–9</u>
40. Blind man	—	—	—	<u>9:1–7</u>
41. Lazarus	—	—	—	<u>11:1–45</u>
42. Many more	—	—	—	<u>20:30–31; 21:25</u>

THE HEALING MINISTRY OF GOD THROUGH MEN

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
1. Disciples	<u>10:1–15</u>	<u>3:15; 6:7–13</u>	<u>9:1–6</u>	—
2. Unknown men	—	<u>9:38–40</u>	<u>9:49–50</u>	—
3. Seventy-two	—	—	<u>10:1–20</u>	—

The following overview gives a detailed picture of what Christ's healing ministry would have looked like to us had we lived during His time. This will offer tremendous insight to our discussion later on when we ask, 'Does the pattern of alleged healings today look anything like those done by our Lord?' You can decide for yourself from this inductive study of the Gospels.

REASONS FOR HEALING

Various reasons existed for Christ's healing ministry, all of which contributed to the authentication of the person of Jesus as the true Messiah. Christ never performed healing miracles merely for their physical benefit, as we can see from these New Testament passages. Healing miracles were—

<u>Matthew 8:17</u>	A preview fulfillment of the messianic prophecy in <u>Isaiah 53:4</u> .
<u>Matthew 9:6</u>	To let people know that Christ had the authority to forgive sins (<i>see also</i> <u>Mark 2:10</u> ; <u>Luke 5:24</u>).
<u>Matthew 11:2–19</u>	To authenticate the messianic ministry for John the Baptist, who was in prison (cf. <u>Isaiah 35</u> ; <i>see also</i> <u>Luke 7:18–23</u>).
<u>Matthew 12:15–21</u>	A preview fulfillment of the messianic prophecy in <u>Isaiah 42:1–4</u> .
<u>John 9:3</u>	To let people see the works of God on display in Christ.
<u>John 11:4</u>	For the glory of God through Christ.
<u>John 20:30–31</u>	To call people to believe that Jesus is the Christ.
<u>Acts 2:22</u>	God's authentication of Christ.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHRIST'S HEALINGS

Healing Had Purpose

Although Jesus did many miracles, He did not perform them indiscriminately. He did not always heal everyone who needed healing (John 5:3–5), nor did He perform signs on request (Matt. 12:38–40), nor did He use His powers to avoid the cross (Matt. 26:52–53). Our Lord's miracles always accomplished the purposes documented above.

Healing Was Immediate

With three exceptions, all of Christ's healings were instantaneous (Matt. 8:22–26; Luke 17:11–19; John 9:1–7). No recuperative period was needed; the afflicted were immediately returned to complete health. There were no relapses or misunderstandings about being healed: 'In order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins—then He said to the paralytic—"Rise, take up your bed, and go home" ' (Matt. 9:6–7).

Also, the three delays in healing involved *minutes* only, and the men involved were *totally* healed. For example, in Mark 8 a blind man was brought to Jesus:

After spitting on his eyes, and laying His hands upon him, [Jesus] asked him, 'Do you see anything?' And he looked up and said, 'I see men, for I am seeing them like trees, walking about.' Then again He laid His hands upon his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly. And He sent him to his home saying, 'Do not even enter the village' (v. 22–26).

Healings Were Abundant

Jesus' miracles were unlimited in number and scope. 'The multitude marveled as they saw the dumb speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel' (Matt. 15:31). His miracles were never confined to special times or locations. Jesus healed in the course of His travels all over Israel. Out of the suffering masses, His attendants never selected only those few who would actually see Him; rather, He frequently healed all who came to Him.

Healing in Absentia

Healing did not require Jesus' physical presence. He merely thought or spoke the word, and healing was accomplished. A centurion's slave (Matt. 8:5–13), a Canaanite's daughter (Matt. 15:21–28), and the son of an official in Capernaum (John 4:49–53) received their healings apart from Jesus' presence.

Healing Methods Varied

As is true of God's healings in the Old Testament, Jesus used a variety of healing methods in the New Testament. The power of God healed; nothing magical or cure-producing is connected to the method itself.

1. Christ touched (Matt. 8:15).
2. Christ spoke (John 5:8–9).
3. The afflicted touched Christ's cloak (Matt. 9:20–22).
4. Christ used spittle (Mark 8:22–26).
5. Christ plugged a man's ears with His fingers and placed spittle on his tongue (Mark 7:33–35).
6. Christ anointed with clay (John 9:6).

Jesus Approved of Doctors

Jesus recognized the normal means of physical healing—a doctor and medicine. Not once did He demean the medical profession. One day He announced, 'It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick' (Matt. 9:12). He approvingly told of the Samaritan who used oil, wine, and bandages to help the abandoned Jew (Luke 10:30–37).

Healing for God's Glory

Although sickness can result directly from personal sin, as evidenced in the Old Testament, nowhere in the Gospel accounts is sickness attributed directly to personal sin. However, Scripture states twice that sickness occurred so that God could be glorified. For example, Martha and Mary approached Jesus one day and asked Him to heal their brother Lazarus. He responded, 'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it' (John 11:4).

Christ's Healing Ministry Was Unique

Scripture states emphatically that in previous history there had never been a healing ministry like Christ's: 'As they were going out, behold, a dumb man, demon-possessed, was brought to Him. And after the demon was cast out, the dumb man spoke; and the multitudes marveled, saying, "Nothing like this was ever seen in Israel"' (Matt. 9:32–33).

Jesus Shunned Acclaim

Jesus went out of His way to avoid public approval or reward for His healing miracles. In Luke 10:20 He told the disciples explicitly not to rejoice in the power they had been given but to rejoice in the fact that their names were recorded in heaven.

Christ never sought fame and fortune through healing. For a while He drew large crowds who heard His kingdom message, but later they crucified Him in spite of all the miracles.

Healings Were Undeniable

The spectator reaction to Christ's healings proved phenomenal. Everyone, including His enemies, stood amazed, astounded, and unable to deny or discredit the miracles.

In fact, one of the most incredible statements affirming Christ's ministry came from the unbelieving Pharisees and priests:

Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, 'What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation' (John 11:47-48).

Reactions Were Widespread

Christ's healings brought widespread reaction. Mark 1:45 describes how the news of Christ's healing ministry spread to such an extent that He could no longer enter a city without being mobbed. Even though He remained in unpopulated areas, people came to Him from everywhere.

Christ's Healing Did Not Necessarily Save

Christ's miracles could not be denied (John 3:2), but they did not necessarily lead to faith. Consider the residents of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, for example:

I say to you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city. Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will be brought down to Hades! (Luke 10:12-15).

Faith Was Not Necessary

An expression of a personal faith was *not* a necessary requirement for healing. Lazarus (John 11), Jairus' daughter (Matt. 9), and the widow's son (Luke 7) were all dead and incapable of displaying faith. Yet they arose from the dead.

Furthermore, wherever Jesus healed the multitudes it can be assumed that most, if not all, eventually rejected Christ and His gospel. In Luke 17, when Jesus healed ten lepers, only 'one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him' (v. 15-16). Note Jesus' response:

'Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? Was no one found who turned back to give glory to God, except this foreigner?' And He said to him, 'Rise, and go your way; your faith has made you well' (v. 17-19).

Another's Faith Honored

At times Christ healed when someone other than the one afflicted displayed his faith. Note especially Matthew 17:19-20; the disciples had been unable to cast out a demon and came to Jesus privately for further instruction. He informed them that they lacked faith. The parallel passage in Mark 9:28-29 adds that prayer would have been successful. Thus anyone who claims that a person can remain unhealed because of his or her own lack of faith needs to be corrected and warned. In this case the deficient faith belonged to the would-be healers.

Healings Were Not Prearranged

Jesus healed from the beginning of His ministry (Matt. 4:23–25) to the end (John 11:1–44). Often He initiated the interaction and approached the person, as He did the lame man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1–9). Furthermore, Jesus always healed during the normal course of His daily ministry. Two blind men who happened to be in the same vicinity as Jesus during His travels were healed when they asked Him for mercy (Matt. 9:27–29).

Healing for Satan-Caused Sickness

Not all sickness is directly caused by Satan or demons, but those who are possessed by demons are liable to have physical infirmities. Luke 13:10–17 provides a classic example, where a woman bound by Satan (possibly through a demon) was doubled over for 18 years.

Heavenly Healing Power

Because Christ had voluntarily abandoned the *independent* exercise of His divine attributes, His healing power came from God the Father; it was not self-generated:

- He cast out demons by the Spirit of God (Matt. 12:28).
- The power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing (Luke 5:17).
- He cast out demons by the finger of God (Luke 11:20).
- ‘The Son can do nothing of Himself’ (John 5:19).
- ‘Signs which God performed through Him’ (Acts 2:22).
- Christ healed because God was with Him (Acts 10:38).

Healing by the Disciples

People other than Christ performed healings in the Gospel accounts. For example, Jesus Himself sent the disciples on their preaching and healing excursions (Matt. 10:1–15). Seventy-two others went out with a similar commission from the Lord to preach and heal (Luke 10:1–16).

A Final Word

The evidence is stunning. Christ’s healings were—

- undeniable
- instant
- spectacular
- authoritative
- overwhelming
- without limitations
- abundant
- total
- awesome
- convincing

No one before or since has even fractionally approached the power of Jesus Christ to heal. He remains forever unique. No one could possibly claim to have a healing ministry like Christ’s. However, God’s healing power did not stop with His Son but continued on through the apostles. The Acts and New Testament epistles tell that story next.