

“WHERE FAITH AND SCIENCE MEET (#4): BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT”

(Luke 8:43-48)

© 2010 Rev. Dr. Brian E. Germano

[PROPS NEEDED: (#1) “Mad Scientist” clip; (#2) Jesus picture]

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 1-31-10]

–I–

1. [Traditional Service ONLY:] Read Text: Luke 8:43-48 and Pray.
2. [VIDEO INTRODUCTION BY “MAD SCIENTIST” LUDWIG VON NEBUCHADNEZZAR:
“Faith OR Medicine?” (Time:3:00)]

A–Will Professor Ludwig *ever* get rid of his headaches? Well, that’s a question that’s sort of tied to today’s subject as we continue our series Where Faith and Science Meet.

B–This morning we’re looking at the relationship between faith and medical science (or faith and physiology), in order to understand how these two interact as they relate to our physical well-being.
3. To do this, I want to first talk about some of the “tools” that both of these “bring to the table” (so to speak), and then talk about how God intends for them to work *together*, not as *rivals* but as *complements* to each other. (*Refer to bulletin sermon notes...*)

–II–

4. Now, since as a culture we’re generally more familiar with the CONTRIBUTIONS OF MEDICAL SCIENCE, I’ll only briefly remind us of two:

A–First, medical science give us **knowledge and understanding** about physiology – an awareness of the amazing intricacies of our human body, and of its functions and processes – it gives us the mechanics /the “HOW” of our bodies.

B–And second, it also brings the **skill of trained professionals** to bear on the problems of sickness and disease that *affect* our bodies – people who are specifically trained to know what to look for and experienced enough to offer reasoned diagnoses and treatments. ¹
5. But if medical science contributes both *knowledge* and *professional skill* to physiology, then WHAT DOES RELIGIOUS FAITH BRING? Why do we need religious faith to help interpret and inform the tools of medicine?

A–Well, let me first suggest that one of the greatest “tools” that faith contributes is **Hope**.

1–You know, even modern medicine is now recognizing (and documenting) the role and power of hope in the physiological recovery of a patient –at the very least it creates a higher quality of life when we’re going through suffering. ²

2–And in many ways, I believe that hope is really just another way to describe *faith and trust in God* – it’s an awareness of a power outside ourselves – in this case, the power and presence of God in our lives, of the recognition that God is *not* the source of our *disease*,³ but that He instead *is* the ultimate source of our *healing*.

3–Any of you that have ever had me visit you while in the hospital will know that this is precisely why I leave you with a picture of Jesus [SHOW PICTURE...] to remind you to have hope ...by reminding you where your strength and healing comes from, no matter what it is that you’re facing medically.⁴

B–A second tool of faith that God gives us for healing is **Prayer**, which even medical science is increasingly coming to recognize the value of in the wholistic healing of patients.⁵

1–Next month we’ll be sharing in a series specifically about prayer, so I don’t want to take away from that, but suffice it to say that prayer is not so much about “getting something” from God, but more about God working His will through *us*.

2–It’s *not* so much about God being a “magic genie” who gives us just what we want (like a certain *kind* of healing), but more about Him changing our *hearts*, so that we can make a difference in the lives of others.

3–Now, this doesn’t in any way preclude the possibility of “miracles” when we pray –I believe in them, have seen them, & have even experienced some personally!⁶

4–But I also know that since God established laws of nature and physics, and gave humans a mind to figure out human physiology, His *usual* method of healing is through the knowledge and professional skills of medical science.⁷

5–So when we pray, we should expect to find God’s peace because we’re opening ourselves up to cooperate with God’s healing plan for us, whether that plan comes through doctors, surgery, medicine, or through an “out of the ballpark” miracle.

C–A final contribution of faith for today is found in the importance of **Community**.

1–Did you know that it’s been statistically proven that people who are actively involved in a community of faith (like a church) live an average of at least 8 years *longer*, and have overall *healthier* lives, than people who don’t?⁸ (How’s *that* for incentive to attend church regularly!?! = “You’ll live longer!”)

2–You see, a community of faith (especially what we find in small groups, like Sunday School, Bible study, choir/praise team⁹) can provide us a support network of friends who’ll be there through whatever we face, and can help us cope emotionally, mentally, and even physically with the stresses and challenges of our lives, ...so that being an active part of a *community* enhances our healing and well-being.

6. Now, you can see that these three “tools” that faith contribute to our well-being are not as “tangible” as those of medical science.

A–But since the wholistic health of our human body requires a *wholistic* approach,¹⁰ it means that “intangibles” like hope, prayer, and community are just as important to a person’s healing as are surgeries and medicines,...

B–...And that since these “intangibles”¹¹ can’t be created by science or medicine, then spiritual faith (which *can* provide them) must be viewed as a *partner*, rather than as a *rival*.

–III–

7. So, if these are some of the “tools” that both faith and medical science contribute, then exactly HOW is it that these two are intended to work together to bring wholistic healing?

A–Well, today’s scripture from Luke 8 actually gives an example...

[Contemp. Service ONLY – Let me read you the story... (Read Luke 8:43-48 from MSG)]

1–Here we find a woman who for over 12 years has tried to find healing for her hemorrhage by going to doctors and putting her trust in medical healing.

2–But all to no avail, and in desperation, she turns to faith in Jesus, and finds healing.

B–Now, let’s be clear about something: ...this story is *not* saying that faith is somehow *better than* medicine, or that we should pray and trust God *instead of* going to see doctors.¹²

1–No. The implication is that this woman has for 12 years left God and faith *out* of her quest for healing altogether – as Prof. of Psychiatry Thomas Szasz (pron. ‘Saas’) reminds us (on screen), “[*In times past*], when *religion was strong and science weak*, [*humans*] *mistook magic for medicine*; now, when *science is strong and religion weak*, [*humans often*] *mistake medicine for magic*.”¹³

2–In other words, like so many of us today, this woman was substituting faith in *medicine* for faith in *God*.

C–And that makes today’s story the story of her discovery of *faith* in her search for healing – the story of her claiming of *wholistic* healing... healing of body, mind *and* spirit.¹⁴

1–It’s a story that once again affirms the *complementary* roles that both faith and medicine play in the healing process – that they both have their place, but that either *by itself* is inadequate to accomplish wholistic healing.

2–Instead, it tells us that God’s people are *NOT* to be people of “faith *or* science / prayer *or* medicine,” ...but people of “faith *and* science / prayer *and* medicine.”

-IV-

8. So, you might ask, what's the bottom line for us in all of this? Well, I think it's found in the words of Jesus in Verse 48 (NRSV): "*Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace."*

A—Now, I don't think "faith" here means what some TV evangelists mean when they imply that "*If you just have enough faith, God will heal you miraculously*"—essentially making physical health *dependent* on us having "faith" in a particular *type/form* of healing.

B—No. I think it's saying that when you've tried everything else and there's nothing left to turn to, turn to Jesus and he'll give you a wellness that you just can't find anywhere else.

1—I think it's saying that whatever challenge or brokenness you face – whether it's in your *body, mind, spirit*, emotions, relationships, or even your finances – if you'll reach out and touch him (even today, right now),...

2—... You'll begin to find *shalom* (wholeness, wellness, peace), and you'll hear Jesus say to you, "*Son/daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace.*"

C—And *that* is my hope and prayer for each of us here today, as well.

9. **INVITATION:** *While your heads are bowed and eyes closed, I want to encourage you, if you're here today and have never put your trust in Jesus (whether this is your first time back in church in a while, or have been here all your life)... either way, today would be a great day to trust him with your body, mind and spirit. I mean, what do you have to lose? ...Stress, anxiety, sickness. And what do you have to gain? ...Peace, joy, meaning, purpose, and maybe even years to your life. Perhaps today will be the day that you say "I choose faith. I choose Christ." And if so, I invite you to pray this prayer with me, quietly under your breath... **PRAYER:** Thank you Jesus for accepting me. I trust you with my life and want to be one of your followers. I accept you as my Savior and choose to follow you as my Lord. Heal me and bring me your shalom, In your holy name, Amen.]*

11. Now, as we end today, we're also offering you a time to experience wholistic healing:...

A—First, by giving you – as you leave the Sanctuary today – a small gift (hand sanitizer) from our church's Health & Wellness ministry to remind you of the importance of you taking care of yourself physically...

B—...And then second, by inviting you to come forward to the altar now for a time of prayer and anointing for your own physical, mental, and spiritual healing (or that of others you know). Prayer ministers will be here to welcome & pray with you. Come as you feel led...

ENDNOTES:

1. It's true that these days we can look stuff up online and try to figure out what's wrong when we're sick, but there's simply no substitute for going to the doctor and being diagnosed by someone who's been *specifically trained* to know what to look for, and who is experienced enough to know what to suggest in terms of making reasoned, intelligent diagnoses that can lead to helpful medical treatments.

2. It's been documented that faith and trust in God actually seem to play some role physiologically in enhancing our healing. While fear in our sickness and in the future seems to inhibit healing, hope and trust in God seem to enhance it.

3. Hope enables us to see that sickness and suffering are not something God sends our way. But if not from God, then from where do sickness, illness, and bodily problems actually come? I suggest several answers in my sermon "*Car Wrecks, Cancer and HIV*" from my series Where Is God When...? (January 18, 2009) at our website www.eastcobbumc.org (Click on "Past Sermons"). But in addition, in his sermon "*Medical Science and the Power of Faith*," Adam Hamilton suggests they come from several sources: (1) we sometimes bring them upon ourselves (for example, by not taking care of our bodies, overeating, not exercising, etc.); (2) bodily problems are sometimes simply the result of nature / growing old (i.e., our bodies weren't meant to last forever; they have planned obsolescence after about 75 or so years); and (3) sometimes bad cell mutations "just happen" (with the billions of cells of our bodies all having function properly for us to have good health, it's surprising it doesn't happen more often); and (4) sometimes sickness is simply a product of living in a "fallen" world where germs and disease exist (we catch a disease that exists around us and we get sick) [January 29-30, 2005, in his series Where Science and Religion Meet, www.cor.org].

4. Read what Paul says about trust and hope in Philippians 4:6-7.

5. And here I don't merely refer to "blind prayer" (where a patient doesn't even know they're being prayed for), but especially consider the value of, for example, a loved one coming along at our bedside, holding our hand, and offering a prayer for us. That type of prayer holds the most value of all.

6. Let me be clear: God *IS* capable of doing miracles – I believe that and pray for that whenever I pray for those who are sick. But I also know that miracles are not God's *ordinary* way of operating in our world – if it were, we wouldn't need hospitals or doctors. Instead, we'd just go see a pastor and let them pray over us with a magic prayer for healing, and we'd be healed. Now, that would be nice, but it's just not how God normally works. No, even in the Bible we find that God normally works through *people*, and as long as *people* can do a certain job, He would rather have them do it than to directly intervene. I also believe (and we talked about this last week) that since God established laws of nature, physics and biology, He usually won't violate those to do a miracle. And so, for both of these reasons, I believe that in times of sickness and illness, God usually works through people like doctors and nurses, and through natural methods of healing like medicine and surgery. On occasion He goes outside those, and we call them "miracles". I've personally seen examples of these, and I've even been the recipient of a healing miracle (of sorts) in my own life a while back: ...back in February 1987, I was experiencing what seemed to be the symptoms of flu as I started on a plane trip to Tulsa, OK. I began praying a deeply heartfelt prayer for healing while in the air, and by the time we touched down I noticed that my symptoms were somehow amazingly gone (and I didn't experience anymore symptoms the whole 4 days that I was there!). Coincidence? Perhaps. But in my mind at the time, it was a direct, miraculous response to my prayer for healing.

7. So when we pray for healing, we should pray for God's work through *both* the ordinary and the miraculous means, trusting that God will do what's best for us using the *manner* that He thinks is best.

8. Based on study by Dr. Andrew Newberg (Univ. Of Penn.), the average life expectancy of a person who *does not* attend church is 75 years, those who attend church *less than weekly* is 80 years, those who attend *weekly* is 82, and those who attend *more than weekly* have an average life expectancy of 83 years. His conclusion is that somehow being part of a church family makes a difference in our physical well-being [Study cited by Rev. Adam Hamilton in his sermon "*Medical Science and the Power of Faith*", Where Science and Religion Meet (Jan. 20-30, 2005), www.cor.org].

9. As important as corporate worship is in the life of a person (especially a Christian believer), what really makes the difference in a person's well-being is their activeness in a small group, because it's precisely in a small group that we can build these kinds of friendships that will help enhance and strengthen our well-being, and help us get the fullest benefits of being part of a community of faith.

10. Remember that for the past 200 years there's been a tendency (at least in Western culture) to sub-divide human existence in various *distinct and unrelated* dimensions (This division of the self into realms of science, medicine, psychology, and religion can be traced partly to the writings of rational thinkers like Descartes and Emmanuel Kant). So, for example:...If we're sick we go see a *physician*; If we're have emotional challenges, we go see a *psychologist*; and if have a spiritual crisis, we go see a *priest/pastor*. And the work of each of these is *exclusive* of the others – there's no overlap!

But, not only is this view of life *not* held by other world cultures, but over the last 20-30 years even Western *science* has come to recognize that we can't neatly divide human existence like this, but that we as humans are instead more a *unified whole*. For examples, read Paul E. Stroble, Faith Questions: What About Religion and Science? A Study of Reason and Faith (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), pp. 84-85. "*Recent theology and recent science support a view of the person as a multilevel psychosomatic unity who is at the same time a biological organism and a responsible self*" [Ian G. Barbour, When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 149].

Also, despite the divisions of self found in Enlightenment thought, most of us intuitively recognize that we cannot in fact divide ourselves up as neatly as this view proposes. Instead, for example: what happens in our spiritual life affects our cognitive mind; what happens in our mind affects our physical well-being; etc. I experienced this in a very concrete way over 20 years ago when I was having significant stress while attending law school over not knowing what career to take with my life, and this caused me to have physical manifestations so severe that I had to have a colonoscopy to find out what was wrong. So this is how it works: we're not neatly divided into body, mind and spirit, but instead all three of these are interconnected with each other

The Bible, in fact, also shares this unified picture of human nature. There we do not find sharp distinctions within the biblical depictions of body, soul and spirit – the Hebrew term *nephesh* and the Greek term *psyche* – both refer to the human "soul" as a unified life principle that includes body, mind *and* spirit [Read *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, cited in Ian G. Barbour, When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 130]. Barbour himself states, "*The biblical view of the self... [is] a unified activity of thinking, feeling, willing, and acting.... Three terms– heart, soul and mind – describe different but overlapping human characteristics and activities rather than distinct faculties or components of the person*" (Barbour, p. 135). For these reasons, "salvation" in the Christian sense is not merely salvation of the soul/spirit, but of the *whole person*, including mind and body. This is why we have a Health and Wellness ministry at our church, and why we visit persons in the hospital and offer prayer for them – not because we discount medicine, but because medicine alone is insufficient in providing wholistic healing. Instead, wholistic healing requires attention to the healing of the spirit and soul as well as the body, even if the "body" is the initial (or even primary) reason one is hospitalized.

11. They are "intangible" because they're based on something that we can't see, touch, feel, or empirically "prove."

12. In other words, it's not written to glorify the "triumph" of faith *over* science (or in this case, medicine).

13. Szasz (Professor of Psychiatry, State Univ. Of New York, Syracuse, NY), cited in Judson Poling, Do Science and the Bible Conflict? (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), p. 62. In other words, like many of us today, she had actually turned medicine into *God*, rather than seeing it as a tool *from* God.

14. For all we know, Jesus' prayer of faith could have simply "activated" some kind of medicine or ointment that she had been previously given by one of her doctors – her action of faith in touching Jesus' robe may

have simply activated it, allowing her to be “healed.” Either way, the story tells that she finally came to a point where she realized that medical science (no matter how scientifically advanced it is) could only take her so far in her quest for healing – that she needed something more: *faith in God*.

I also hope by now we’ve caught the fact that genuine healing involves and affects more than just the physical body, and that there can therefore be many different *types/forms* of healing, including not only healing of the body, but also of the mind, spirit, relationships, finances, and emotions – that even death itself can be viewed as a form of healing. This means, of course, that when we pray for healing, we dare not limit God to healing us only in certain ways or using certain types/forms. For example, we may pray for physical healing, but God know what we *really* need is the healing of some broken relationship in our life, or the healing of our spirit and relationship with Him, or of our emotions. He may even know that if healing of our physical bodies is not possible, that going to be with Him after death is what’s best for us, and so the “healing” He gives there is the ability to accept and have a peace about that reality.