Healing Stories in Mark and Luke

Teacher Background

The Gospels portray Jesus as a person of compassion, someone who saw the suffering of those around him and responded in word and action. Jesus was not only a teacher but a healer also. Jesus was a travelling healer responding not only to the physical ailments of suffering people but also to their spiritual and psychological suffering. In the world of Jesus, physical suffering was often blamed on the sufferer and regarded as the natural consequence of a sinful life. The sufferer often had his or her suffering compounded by social exclusion as in the case of lepers who were forced to live outside centres of population in appalling conditions. Those who were blind and lame, deaf and dumb were often forced into the indignity of having to beg for their very survival.

The Gospels of Mark and Luke are particularly rich in stories of healing. Jesus is portrayed as healing a variety of physical diseases of the time. Equally importantly, Jesus relates to those he heals seeking to show compassion and understanding to the despised, to bring relief to the suffering, to include the excluded and to manifest the love of God as a loving Father rather than a punitive deity who visited suffering and illness on the sinful. Jesus recognised the spiritual and psychological suffering of people and sought to heal this “driving out demons and evil spirits” as the Gospels describe.

In the New Testament, most healing miracles are narrated according to a fairly regular pattern that typically consists of five stages.

- **Introduction**
  The sick person’s condition is described; the healer encounters the sick person, the sick person is brought to the healer, or at least someone tells the healer about the sick person.

- **Conflict**
  Often the healer first investigates what the sick person wants or needs; sometimes the healer hesitates or tests the sick person’s readiness to be healed; sometimes other persons intervene or delay the healing.

- **Action**
  The healing itself can be brought about either verbally, or through simple touch, or through more elaborate therapeutic means. Sometimes the healing action is only implied, but not explicitly described.

- **Confirmation**
  The fact that the healing has taken place is either asserted by the narrator or demonstrated through some action performed by the person who has been healed.

- **Reaction**
  Usually some reaction is reported for those who witnessed the event. In the Gospels, this response is often positive, involving praise given to God. Sometimes there are negative reactions from some opponents.