

Theological analysis of Θεραπεία (healing) of an unclean spirit boy in Luke 9:37-43 in relation to healing practices in Christ Apostolic Church, Nigeria

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Abstract

Health and healing are vital aspects of human existence, often prompting individuals to go to great lengths in search of relief. When conventional medicine fails to resolve their health issues, many turn to prayer houses or traditional healers for solutions. Healing was a central part of Jesus' earthly mission, and in response to His directive for disciples to preach the gospel and heal the sick, the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) has prioritized healing as a key aspect of its ministry. However, concerns have arisen over some ministers employing unbiblical methods such as selling anointing oil, handkerchiefs, and water and seeking rewards from those healed, practices that diverge from Jesus' example. This study examines the healing ministry in the Gospel of Luke and its application in the CAC to evaluate the extent of alignment with Jesus' teachings. Using a mixed-method approach, hermeneutical and exegetical analysis of biblical texts, alongside a descriptive survey the research highlights that healing is a divine intervention that liberates individuals from suffering, restores hope, and promotes holistic well-being. The study concludes that healing remains a vital component of the CAC's worship and outreach, contributing to the salvation of members. It recommends that Jesus' healing practices, as recorded in Luke's Gospel, should serve as the standard for contemporary healing ministry in the church.

Keywords: Therapeia, Healing, Miraculous Healing, Salvation, Christ Apostolic Church

Introduction

The nature of human life makes it essential for individuals to pursue and maintain good health. Healing miracles can be understood as the restoration of brokenness whether between individuals or between people and the wider world. Since the beginning of time, humanity has sought ways to overcome suffering caused by illness, adversity, and other forces that diminish human well-being. Jesus' healing ministry aimed at holistic restoration encompassing mental, physical, and spiritual health. As Adamo (2019) observes, human beings are a unified whole composed of body, soul (mind), and spirit, each element intricately connected and influencing the others. Furthermore, humans are in constant interaction with their environment, which also affects their overall functioning. Abogunrin (2017) notes that sickness and disease often arise from imbalances, either within a person or from environmental factors. Jesus' approach to healing did not stop at physical restoration. He ensured that individuals were also made whole spiritually and mentally. Many of His healing acts led to a declaration of faith, either before or after the miracle occurred.

Healing is a significant theme throughout the Bible. It restores completeness to a person's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Third John 2 highlights God's desire for humans to be healthy, just as their souls thrive. Healing often occurs through divine intervention, with or without natural means, and is closely tied to faith. Faith is not only a consistent element in Jesus' healing ministry but also a key

factor that creates a conducive environment for miracles. Where faith exists, healing becomes possible even in the direct situations.

New Testament accounts emphasize that Jesus is the sole source of true healing, and such restoration comes only through faith in Him and His name. Health is universally valued, seen not just as a good, but as essential for a meaningful life. In modern societies especially in the West this has given rise to increased demands on health systems and the growth of wellness and alternative medicine industries. Howard (2010) states that throughout Scripture, the message of salvation has often been affirmed by acts of healing. Idowu (2019) explains that "health" can have varied meanings, including physical, mental, spiritual, and even social well-being especially within Christian understanding, where salvation and health are interconnected. While definitions may differ among organizations like the World Health Organization or medical practitioners, Christian perspectives emphasize holistic wellness.

Jesus' healing ministry was deeply rooted in faith. Faith on the part of the afflicted was often a prerequisite for receiving healing, and this practice reflects a non-medical, spiritual approach to treating disease commonly known as healing by faith. This outlook distinguishes between medical treatment, which addresses the body, and spiritual healing, which concerns the soul and spirit. Jacobson (2016) maintains that true healing involves the whole person and

draws on both physical and spiritual techniques. God has embedded natural healing powers within creation and placed healing agents in our surroundings.

Additionally, Cranfield (2016) notes that God's original purpose for humanity to enjoy a healthy life has been significantly threatened by illness and disease. In light of the ongoing health crises, this study seeks to explore both divine and human responses to health issues. It specifically focuses on the concept of *therapeia* as presented in the Gospel of Luke and its application within the Christ Apostolic Church (C.A.C.) in Nigeria. The Gospel of Luke was chosen due to its detailed and abundant accounts of Jesus' healing miracles, which surpass those found in the other synoptic Gospels.

The Text: Luke 9:37 – 43

37 Εγενετο δέ τή ἐξῆς ἡμέρα κατελθόντων αὐτῶν ἀποποῦ ὅρους συνηγήτησεν αὐτῷ ὄχλος πολὺς 38 καὶ ἰδοὺ ἀνὴρ ἀπο τοῦ ὄχλου ἐβόησέν λέγων, Διδασκαλε, δέομαί σου ἐπιβλεψαί ἐπὶ τὸν υἱόν μου ὅτι μονογενὴς μοί ἐστιν, 39 καὶ ἰδοὺ πνεῦμα λαμβανεὶ αὐτόν καὶ ἐξαίφνης κραεῖ καὶ σπαράσσει αὐτόν μετὰ ἀφροῦ καὶ μογὶς ἀποχωρεῖ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ συντριβὼν αὐτόν. 40 καὶ ἐδεήθη τῶν μαθητῶν σου ἵνα ἐκβάλωσιν αὐτόν καὶ οὐκ ἠδυνήθησαν 41 ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν Ὁ γένεα ἀπίστος καὶ διεστραμμένη ἕως πότε ἔσομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ ἀνεξομαι ὑμῶν; προσάγαγε ὡς τὸν υἱόν σου. 42 ἔτι δε προσερχομένου αὐτοῦ ἐρρηξεν αὐτόν τὸ δαιμόνιον καὶ συνεσπαραξεν ἐπετίμησεν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς τῷ πνευματῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ καὶ ἰάσατο τὸν παῖδα καὶ ἀπέδωκεν αὐτόν τῷ πατρί αὐτοῦ 43 ἐξεπλήρσοντο δὲ πάντες ἐπὶ τῇ μεγαλειότητι τοῦ Θεοῦ.

37 On the following day, a great crowd met him, after they had descended from the mountain. 38 And behold, a man from the crowd cried, "Teacher I beg you to look upon my son, for he is my only child; 39 And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out; it convulses him till he foams, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him. 40 And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not. 41 Jesus answered, 'O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.' 42 While he was coming, the demon tore him and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and gave him back to his father. 43 And all were astonished at the majesty of God.

3 Exegetical Analysis of Healing in Luke 9:37 – 43 of the boy with Unclean Spirit

This passage captures a critical moment that follows the transfiguration, and Luke skillfully links it to broader themes of faith, failure, and divine authority. There are no breaks in the narrative; instead, Luke connects this healing story to the disciples' later conversations, particularly their misunderstanding of Jesus' impending suffering and their struggle for status. The exorcism narrative stands as a key event in this transition. Sabourin (2014) identifies literary and thematic links across the passage, such as the recurring references to the boy as a "son" and later as a "child," and the crowd's recurring reaction of astonishment. These links

bind the individual episodes into a unified theological reflection on discipleship, faith, and divine power. According to Dunn (2010), although the passage contains Christological elements, the primary focus is on the disciples' failure. Coming right after the glorious transfiguration, their inability to cast out the demon is a stark contrast. They lack faith, misunderstand Jesus' mission, and even later attempt to control others doing ministry successfully (v. 49).

The passage showcases core themes of Jesus' Galilean ministry healing, deliverance, and the inclusive grace of God. Abogunrin (2017) notes that Jesus' redemptive power isn't tied to social status, ritual formulas, or magical techniques. The power to heal, granted earlier to the disciples (Luke 9:1), requires a lifestyle and faith consistent with Jesus' teachings. Their failure here reveals a lack of spiritual maturity and preparedness. Dairo (1995) emphasizes that faithful character is a prerequisite for participating in God's mission. Jesus' rebuke in verse 41 ("O faithless and perverse generation...") reflects this expectation and highlights the disciples' spiritual inadequacy. Geisler (2012) suggests that this failure sets the stage for the next major section of Luke's Gospel, starting in 9:51, where Jesus begins His final journey to Jerusalem focused on forming disciples capable of understanding and living out His mission. Salm (2016) and Dodd (2016) argue that the transfiguration and the failed exorcism are theologically linked: the disciples must learn to reconcile glory and suffering, power and humility, divine status and human rejection.

The crowd plays a secondary but important role. Though they have been in the background since the feeding miracle (vv. 12–17), they re-emerge here as witnesses. Akintunde (2017) notes that their amazement ("they were all astonished at the majesty of God") reflects their recognition of divine authority in Jesus' healing act. Caird (1995) observes the intensity of the boy's suffering and the father's desperation. The fact that the child is the man's only son adds emotional weight and social urgency—echoing earlier Lukan themes (7:12; 8:42) of Jesus restoring family lines and community identity through healing. The disciples' inability to help mirrors the helplessness of physicians in other stories (e.g., the woman with the hemorrhage in Luke 8:43). Oderinde (2016) points out the persistence of the father's faith—despite his son's worsening condition and the disciples' failure, he still turns to Jesus. This contrast between the ineffective disciples and the trusting father intensifies the scene.

Goldson (2017) highlights this contrast further: the man first begs the disciples, who fail, and then turns to Jesus, who succeeds—demonstrating that true authority lies in Christ alone. Jesus' harsh words again underscore the disciples' spiritual unreadiness and echo Deuteronomy's language of a "faithless generation" (Deut. 32:5), suggesting that the disciples are falling into the same pattern of disbelief as Israel in the wilderness. Calloud (2012) explains that the disciples' recurring failure—seen previously in the storm (8:22–25), the feeding miracle (9:12–17), and now this exorcism—underscores their need for deeper formation as

followers of Jesus, especially with His passion approaching (9:22, 44). Calvin (2008) and Cameron (2015) stress that Jesus' word alone is powerful enough to drive out the demon and restore the boy—no ritual, no spectacle, just divine authority in action. Luke makes no strict separation between illness and demonic affliction, showing that healing involves spiritual, physical, and relational restoration.

The final verse (v. 43) ties the event back to the crowd's initial presence and reinforces the theme of God's majesty being revealed through Jesus' ministry. This moment of awe connects directly to the transfiguration and serves to reaffirm Jesus' identity and mission. Luke 9:37–43 encapsulates a rich theological moment where Jesus' divine power is contrasted with human weakness. The healing of the boy with the unclean spirit not only affirms Jesus' authority but also challenges His disciples—and by extension, the Church—to cultivate unwavering faith and spiritual readiness. It reflects the necessity of both divine intervention and faithful living in the pursuit of holistic healing.

Healing And Exorcism

Exorcism the act of driving out evil spirits has ancient roots, as evidenced by Egyptian and Babylonian texts. The earliest biblical account of exorcism appears in 1 Samuel 16–19. With the influence of Eastern beliefs in ancient Palestine, the idea that demons could control humans became more prominent. By Jesus' time, exorcisms were fairly common. In the Gospels, Jesus stands out as a unique exorcist. Unlike other exorcists who relied on rituals, prayers, or invoking external powers, Jesus cast out demons solely by His word and authority (Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20). His exorcisms often left people in awe and fear (Mark 1:27; 5:14–15), though some accused Him of using demonic powers (Mark 3:20–27). Scholars like Douglas (2018) argue that Jesus was the first to associate exorcism directly with the defeat of Satan.

Jesus also empowered His disciples to perform exorcisms (Luke 9:1–6), and this practice continued into the early Church, though notably absent in John's Gospel. While John emphasized the cross as the triumph over evil (John 12:32), Mark and Luke highlighted the Church's authority to exorcise in Jesus' name (Mark 6:7–13; Luke 10:17; Acts 16:18). The success of early Christian exorcisms was attributed not to elaborate techniques, but to simple commands issued in Jesus' name—with prayer used for more difficult cases (Mark 9:28–29).

In the post-apostolic period, exorcism evolved. Galen (2009) notes that beyond using Jesus' name, elements like touch, breath, and the sign of the cross were introduced. Exorcism even became part of baptismal rites. Healing and exorcism were seen as signs of the Holy Spirit's presence and power, especially in worship settings. Fitzmyer (2011) describes Holy Spirit baptism as a spiritual healing that guards against sickness, sin, and grants eternal life.

Healing Practices Christ Apostolic Church

In CAC, healing is a core part of worship and spiritual life. Specific days—especially Wednesdays and Fridays—are set

aside for healing services, which occur daily in some congregations. Some churches even offer accommodations for the sick, with “faith homes” functioning as maternity and healing centers. Alana (2018) outlines CAC's doctrinal position: the Church discourages both medical and traditional treatments involving herbs, charms, or objects. Instead, healing is sought through simple, faith-based practices. Adamo (2012) describes the healing process in CAC as: Confession of sins (as sin or spiritual attack is often believed to be the root of illness), Anointing with oil, laying on of hands, and use of sanctified water, Prayers of command and authority in Jesus' name.

A typical healing declaration in Yoruba might be: “I command you, in the name of Jesus, foul spirit, leave this body; so shall it be. Glory to God for the healing.” The blood of Jesus is also invoked for spiritual protection and deliverance. Though critics argue that CAC's healing approach can appear as forcing God to act, the Church maintains that its prayer warriors are simply exercising the authority given by Jesus. While some challenge the rejection of medical care, CAC views divine healing as a biblical fulfillment of prayer offered in faith.

The 1930 Revival, led by Apostle Joseph Ayo Babalola, marked a turning point in the history of healing within CAC. The revival witnessed massive conversions and miraculous healings. People voluntarily surrendered idols, magical items, and charms, abandoning traditional religion for Christ. Notable events included: Converts turning in items like the Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses, poisoned rings, carved idols, and ritual garments. Muslims praised God using prayer beads, and traditionalists handed over sacred objects for destruction. Reports of miraculous healings included cures of chronic illnesses, blindness, infertility, epilepsy, mental illness, and even cases of resurrection. At the Oke-Bola revival in Ibadan, documentation was meticulous. In just three weeks, over 2,500 people were reportedly healed, with ailments ranging from delayed pregnancies to paralysis, blindness, and spiritual afflictions. Joseph Babalola's authority was so evident that even demonic spirits acknowledged his spiritual dominance.

Conclusion

Healing in CAC is deeply rooted in the teachings and actions of Jesus, especially as recorded in Luke's Gospel. Jesus' divine identity and the anointing of the Holy Spirit empowered Him to heal with spoken commands. As believers connect in faith with the power of Christ, healing flows supernaturally, resulting in instant miracles.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

- Adhere closely to Jesus' healing methods as presented in the Gospel of Luke.
- Prevent misuse or abuse of healing practices within the church.
- Protect the sick by ensuring only healthy members are encouraged to fast, especially in cases where fasting may pose medical risks.

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