



Exodus 15:22-27
 What's In A Name?
 Jehovah Rapha: The God Who Heals

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This morning we continue our series titled, “What’s In A Name?” And in this series we are looking at some of the names of God given to us in Scripture. Each of the different Biblical names for God give us a different window into who God is. They help us to understand him, his character, and what he is like. And this morning we find out about another name of God as we read from Exodus 15.

This passage takes place just after Moses had led the Israelites out of Egypt, through the Red Sea. So you can imagine the stress and drama of that whole event, not to mention the brokenness of the oppressive slavery to the Egyptians they’d experienced for so long. That’s the background for what we read this morning, **Exodus 15:22-27. (Sermon Graphic after).**

About 16 years ago, when I was still a teenager...Just kidding. I was in my early 30’s but *thought* I was still a teenager as you’ll tell from this story...I got into a bit of a competition with my niece who actually was a teenager at the time. I think I’ve shared some of this story before 6 or 7 years ago, but it will be new to many of you. Our niece was also a gymnast and she and I started having a competition in their back yard to see who could hold a handstand the longest...then it morphed into her doing acrobatics and challenging me to do them also. So, there were cartwheels and round-offs and front handsprings, and I don’t know what all else, even if I didn’t do them with as much grace and good form as she did.

The next day or so, my lower back was sore. Not like “I can’t move” sore, but sore enough for me to realize I wasn’t a teenager anymore. Though, to be completely vulnerable, I still need reminding of that fact every now and then. I could tell I’d done something to my back, even though I didn’t feel anything pop or strain as I followed her lead. Several months later, my back was still sore – I was sleeping with pillows under my knees when I slept on my back, or with my legs bent up in a semi-fetal position on my side...and sleeping on my stomach was a complete impossibility.

So, I spoke with a guy at the church in Salt Lake City that Gwen and I were serving as Associate Co-pastors, and asked about healing prayer. This guy, and he had a really great name...his name is Brian...Brian and his wife, Jean, were the leaders of a healing prayer ministry there in SLC.

Brian suggested that Gwen and I come over to their house some evening, and he and Jean and another person or two would be there, and they would pray for me. So, when the evening came, they had me sit in a chair in their living room, and after asking me some questions about my pain and how it happened and so forth, they laid hands on me and prayed for healing. This is the point in the sermon where things get very un-Presbyterian, and you're simply going to have to believe me, if you don't know me well, that I'm a perfectly sane person, not given to imagining strange things or inventing things...and that what I'm about to tell you is 100% true. Maybe it also helps for you to know that all three of these people are in the medical profession – for instance, Brian is an M.D. with his own Family medicine practice and his wife is a psychiatrist – so I guess if I am imagining things she could have straightened me out.

So, here's what happened: **As they prayed, I felt things move in my lower back where my pain was.** I don't know if it was muscles, or ligaments, or bones, all of the above or something else...I'm no Medical Doctor or expert on human anatomy...I just know that I could feel things start to kind of shift around and move a little...almost like muscle spasms. Standing here right now, I don't recall how long it lasted – it wasn't just a couple seconds where I might almost wonder if I imagined by body doing this; but it also didn't carry on for 3 or 4 minutes. Maybe 15, 20, or 30 seconds or so.

By the time they were done praying, my back felt improved. I was not 100% better, but it was significantly better. I remember talking with Gwen about it and telling her then, and reiterating it over the coming days and weeks, that I felt like my back got 50% or 60% better. This experience confirmed for me that God really is Jehovah Rapha. He is the God Who Heals.

This name for God – The God Who Heals, “Jehovah Rapha” – comes to us in this passage from Exodus that we just read. This is the only place in

Scripture we find this name. The first part of the name, Jehovah, is a common name for God, related to Yahweh, which we looked at last week. Jehovah uses the same Hebrew consonants as Yahweh, but brings in the vowels from the Hebrew word Adonai, which means “Lord.” And then the pronunciation has become more Latinized which carried into English, so we say “Jehovah” instead of “Yehovah.”

And then: **“Rapha” is a simple Hebrew word that means “to mend or stitch together or to heal.”** So used here in conjunction with “Jehovah” we get this name for God, “Jehovah Rapha” – The God who heals.

For some of us, the idea that God would supernaturally heal people seems just a little too bizarre. Perhaps we’re skeptical because of faith healers who have given this a bad reputation. But Scripture is filled with odd things that happen. Even in this passage, we have this case of the Israelites needing water, but the water in the region where they were at this point in the narrative was “bitter.” But there’s a log nearby, or actually, the word most commonly just means “tree”. So, there’s a tree nearby, perhaps already fallen down, and Moses puts it into the water and the water becomes drinkable. It loses its bitterness. **If you think God healing people is kind of strange: How about God healing water through a tree getting thrown into it?** Get used to strange things happening as you read the Bible because as the great theologian Karl Barth once said, when you read Scripture, you enter the “strange new world of the Bible.”

So, at this place that is known for its bitter water, God not only heals the water and makes it drinkable, but God lets them know that he is the God who heals them. It is in his nature to mend his people, to stitch them together, to heal them.

There are a few ways that God does this. **First, and most applicable to the Israelites in this moment, is that God heals the nations.** For the Israelites, as they came out of Egypt after being there for centuries, and were treated more and more poorly as time went on, they needed healing. They needed healing as a nation. They needed to be stitched back together. We need to hear that in our nation today. Have we ever been more divided and broken –

between coronavirus, racial tensions, political divisiveness, and divisive collegiate football allegiances...there's a lot of brokenness. And God's desire is to heal us.

Now, there's a bit of a qualifier to this: The nation has to be in relation with God, and humble themselves before him. We see that here in the passage, where God tells them he will heal them, but they've got to walk in his ways. A famous verse that makes this clear, in addition to what we read here in this passage, is 2 Chronicles 7:14, **"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land"** (2 Chronicles 7:14). It all starts with being in relationship with the God who heals: humbling ourselves before him, acknowledging who he is and his lordship over everything, confessing sin and turning from it, and then he will forgive their sin and heal their land. "Land" doesn't just mean the dirt that they walk upon, but is a metaphor for the whole nation.

So, healing comes when we collectively as a nation are turning to God: on our knees in prayer before him, seeking his face – seeking his presence, his will, his way...confessing the sins of pride and arrogance and divisiveness and not treating all people as the image bearers they are, and so forth...and then God hears those prayers and brings healing to the nation that does this. **Therefore, our prayer for our nation, to begin with, ought to be that more people would get in tune with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.** We need to get back in relationship with God, and *then* we can pray that healing for our nation would come. So that's one way that God heals: to the nations.¹ (Can also think of this as healing relationships, perhaps)

Secondly, God brings physical healing. I shared with you my own story of that, and there are others in the church here who have experienced healings, as well. Sometimes, the healing lasts for years and years...decades, even. Sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes it never comes. When it doesn't come or doesn't last, it can throw doubt onto whether or not a person ever really was healed, or whether or not God actually did it. Or maybe, like my back, it's not a full healing, but a partial one...and perhaps we wonder if God really is involved. Or we wonder if God is real if the healing doesn't happen. But the

lack of healing, or the reoccurring of an injury or an illness, or a partial healing doesn't invalidate the healing God does. Nor does it demonstrate a lack of power on God's part to do the healing. **The healing (any healing, that is) really is a reminder that God is with us in the midst of the storms of life, and points to the complete and total healing that we will receive on the other side of the grave in his eternal presence.**

We can take an extreme example of healing as an illustration to remind us that all healings in this life are temporal anyway: Jesus healed a few people who were not just sick or injured, but dead. Bringing someone back from the dead is the most extreme form of healing that God could do, right? Lazarus is one of those, as well as a widow's son in Luke 7, and Jairus's daughter in Mark 5. There are a few in the Old Testament as well whom God raised from the dead. Let me ask you: Where are those people today? Have you met any of them? Are they still here to tell of their resurrection story? No. Even though their second deaths aren't recorded for us in Scripture, we can make an educated guess that they died again some time later, because they aren't still living among us. The healing of being raised from the dead didn't last forever. But their resurrections point us to the power of God, the God who is not the God of death but the God of life.

We see this in less extreme forms all the time in the life of Jesus: The paralyzed walk, the blind see, the lepers are healed, the mute speak, the deaf hear, and more. None of them are still here in their healed state of being. And as it is with the healing of the nations, this healing happens when we are in relationship with God and trust him. Actually, the relationship part almost doesn't need to be there in order for God to heal us. Just trusting that God will heal is enough, and then without a doubt if you experience a healing then the relationship will follow – how could you turn your back on God who heals you?

For instance, the woman recorded in the Gospels who had been bleeding for twelve years believed that if she even just touched the hem of Jesus' robe that Jesus could heal her: and she did not know Jesus (Luke 8:43-48). That's the level of trust and faith that she had. There was no prior relationship. In fact, when Jesus senses that healing power had gone through

him to someone, he stops and asks “Who touched me?” There was a crowd of people around him, and so it wasn’t obvious. He knew someone had intentionally reached out to him and had been healed. The woman comes forward and says it was her. And Jesus doesn’t then greet her by name. He doesn’t say, “Oh! Hi Jennifer...After all these years of knowing each other, I’m so glad you finally got healed.” He doesn’t say anything like that. She wasn’t someone that he knew. There was no prior relationship. He doesn’t know her name. She simply trusted that Jesus could heal her, because of what she’d already heard about Jesus from others.

That last part is a bit of an aside...**The main point here is: Any earthly healing always wears off eventually as our earthly existence comes to a close; but physical healing is a foreshadowing of the eternal healing God brings in the life to come.** It points to something beyond us and reminds us of God’s promise to be with us. It’s a reminder that he is with us. And so a re-occurring of something God healed doesn’t invalidate the healing or invalidate God’s power and presence. God does heal us physically – not all the time or every time we ask – but he does so in his providence, according to His will, by his grace and mercy...and it’s always for a grander purpose: to point people to the permanent healing that comes through Jesus.

And that brings us to the final way that God heals: **Jehovah Rapha heals us spiritually.** Ultimately, this is the most important healing from God’s perspective, even if from our own perspective we might have a tendency to elevate or prioritize or more greatly desire physical healing. And this spiritual healing that Jehovah Rapha offers comes through Jesus Christ. We actually get a bit of a foreshadowing of that in today’s passage. The tree that Moses put into the bitter water – probably with help of some other people – transformed the water into being drinkable. We might say it “healed” the water.

Similarly, through the wooden cross of Christ you and I are healed spiritually. Even then it’s not the cross per se that does it: It’s Jesus – crucified on the cross – who brings the spiritual healing that we need...brings us peace with God. Isaiah 53:5 gives a prophetic word about this that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Writing some 700 years before Jesus was born,

Isaiah writes, **“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5)**. I know it’s written in past tense, but don’t let it fool you: it’s a prophetic word for the future. This is just the way prophecies are usually written. It’s like the prophet has been transported forward in time for a moment to beyond when a prophecy is fulfilled, and so is able to see back in time on it, and then writes from that perspective. The past-tense of the prophetic word reminds us that it *will* happen. It’s so certain as to come to fruition that he can write as though it already has.

This verse from Isaiah clearly points to Jesus, and the healing it speaks of is our spiritual healing. **In case there’s any doubt, 1 Peter 2:24 quotes it and helps connect the dots for us: that by Jesus’ wounds and his death on the cross, we are healed. Through him, we have a healed relationship with God.** Any other healing we have really springs forth out of this final one; and it’s all grounded in Jesus. So, this spiritual healing is the ultimate healing. It’s lasts not just for a lifetime, but for eternity, and is the one God is most interested in. This healing comes through Jesus when we put our faith and trust in Him, but it flows out of the heart of Jehovah Rapha: The God Who Heals. He takes our lives and our relationships which are bitter with brokenness and sin, and makes them better (not just “better” but I like the alliteration!). It’s in his nature and part of his character to bring healing into our lives, now and forever more. May you, and may we, know His healing power today: in our nation and in our other relationships, in our physical health; and in the depth of our souls. May we know this healing today and into eternity. Let’s pray...Amen.

¹ Revelation 22:2 explicitly says, “On each side of the river stood the tree of life...and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” I didn’t mention this verse in the service, but should have. It helps to make this point clearly.