

Healing Stories in the Gospels (Comments from Church Tradition)

This section focuses on a sampling of comments from early interpreters on two gospel healing stories. First, the stories:

The Healing of the Paralytic

Matthew 9:2–8	Mark 2:2–12	Luke 5:18–26
<p>And just then some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” 3 Then some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” 4 But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? 5 For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk’? 6 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Stand up, take your bed and go to your home.” 7 And he stood up and went to his home. 8 When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.</p>	<p>So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. 3 Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” 6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 “Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 8 At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? 9 Which is</p>	<p>Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; 19 but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. 20 When he saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” 21 Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, “Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 22 When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? 23 Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk’? 24 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the one who was</p>

	<p>easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk’? 10 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— 11 “I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.” 12 And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”</p>	<p>paralyzed—“I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home.” 25 Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God. 26 Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, “We have seen strange things today.”</p>
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Augustine (354–430):

Jesus says, “You have been a paralytic inwardly. You did not take charge of your bed. Your bed took charge of you.” (*On the Ps.* 41.4)

Peter Chrysologus (406–450):

Jesus tells the paralytic, “Take up your bed. Carry the very mat that once carried you. Change places, so that what was the proof of your sickness may now give testimony to your soundness. Your bed of pain becomes the sign of healing, its very weight the measure of the strength that has been restored to you.” (*Homily* 50.6)¹

The Healing of a Man with a Withered Hand

Matthew 12:9–14	Mark 3:1–6	Luke 6:6–11
He left that place and entered their synagogue;	Again he entered the synagogue, and a man	On another sabbath he entered the synagogue

<p>10 a man was there with a withered hand, and they asked him, "Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath?" so that they might accuse him. 11 He said to them, "Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? 12 How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath." 13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and it was restored, as sound as the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.</p>	<p>was there who had a withered hand. 2 They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3 And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." 4 Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. 5 He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6 The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.</p>	<p>and taught, and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. 7 The scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would cure on the sabbath, so that they might find an accusation against him. 8 Even though he knew what they were thinking, he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come and stand here." He got up and stood there. 9 Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?" 10 After looking around at all of them, he said to him, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was restored. 11 But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.</p>
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Athanasius (296–373):

In the synagogue of the Jews was a man who had a withered hand. If he was withered in his hand, the ones who stood by were withered in their minds. And they were not looking at the crippled man nor were they expecting the miraculous deed of the one who was about to work. But before doing the work, the Savior ploughed up their minds with words. For knowing the evil of the mind and its bitter depth, he first softened them up in advance with words so as to tame the wildness of their understanding, asking: "Is it permitted to do good on the sabbath or to do evil; to save a life or to destroy one?" For if he had said

to them, “Is it permitted to work?” immediately they would have said, “You are speaking contrary to the law.” Then he told them what was intended by the law, for he spoke as the One who established the laws concerning the sabbath, adding, “except this: that which will be done for the sake of a life.” Again if a person falls into a hole on a sabbath, Jews are permitted to “pull the person out. This not only applies to a person, but also an ox or a donkey. In this way the law agrees that things relating to preservation may be done, hence Jews prepare meals on the sabbath. Then he asked them about a point on which they could hardly disagree: “Is it permitted to do good?” But they did not even so much as say, “Yes,” because by then they were not in a good temper.” (Homilies 28)²

1. M. F. Toal, trans. and ed., *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: A Manual of Preaching, Spiritual Reading, and Meditation*. 4 vols. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958), 4:191.
2. Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, Vol. 2, *Mark* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 37.