

THE HEALING MESSIAH OF MATTHEW IN MATT 4:23-25

Dr. SUSAIRAJ ANTHONY, SDS

ABSTRACT

The article examines a key passage from the gospel of Matthew that showcases Jesus as a healing messiah. Focusing on the first summary statement of Matthew and through the preliminary, exegetical, and theological analysis of the pericope (Mt 4: 23-25), it explores Matthew's uses of *θεραπεύων* along with *διδάσκων* and *κηρύσσων*. Though the verb *θεραπεύω* is used by Mark and Luke in their parallels to Mt 4: 24 (Mk 3:10 and Lk 6:18), Matthew develops the description of the healing ministry in considerable detail. Matthew redacts Markan material to depict Jesus primarily as a healer. The article highlights the comprehensive nature of Jesus' healing ministries as it presents Jesus as the Messiah of the word and deed. According to Matthew the whole activity of Jesus' teaching, preaching, exorcisms, and healing is messianic. In this way, the significance of healing messiah who heals all diseases and infirmities is concerned with the desire to see scripture fulfilled. The article not only sheds new light on the miraculous nature of Jesus' healing ministry, but also underscores its profound spiritual and physical significance for those who witnessed and experienced his transformative power. It invites us to put our trust in the Matthean Healing Messiah.

KEY WORDS:

Healing, Preaching, Teaching, The Healing, Word, Deed

1. INTRODUCTION

The summary statement of Matthew 4:23-25 presents Jesus as a healing messiah. Here, the narrator characterizes Jesus' Galilean ministry as a mission of teaching (διδάσκων), preaching (κηρύσσων) and healing (θεραπεύων). Though the verb θεραπεύω is used by Mark and Luke in their parallels to Mt 4:24 (Mk 3:10 and Lk 6:18), Matthew develops the description of the healing ministry in considerable detail. In Mt 9:35, the Evangelist repeats the summary statement of the ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing. Matthew's uses of θεραπεύω indicate that healing is one of the three major aspects of the ministry of Jesus to Israel, along with teaching and preaching, and that the disciples are participants with Jesus in this healing activity. Matthew seems much more interested in presenting Jesus as healing in general, rather than in presenting him in the more specific role of exorcist, which is much more typical of Mark's portrayal of Jesus. More significant than quantity, however, is the way in which Matthew redacts Markan material to depict Jesus primarily as a healer. Matthew has distributed his healing summaries and comments throughout the Gospel, and in every summary, Jesus heals all the sick or every disease, or a list of several diseases is given. Such distribution and emphasis

also broaden the base for considering Jesus' healing activity.¹ In this way, Matthew's theological perspective of presenting Jesus as a healing messiah indeed gives hope to the suffering humanity. The methodology that we will employ in our study is synchronic and diachronic method. In order to explore the Matthean theme of healing messiah, we also take recourse to redaction criticism. It helps us to discern the theology of the Evangelist and the situation of his community.² This article is divided into three sections: the first section deals with the preliminary analysis of Matthew 4:23-25, where the delimitation and structure of the text, literary form and the redaction of the text are presented. The second section deals with the exegetical analysis of the text, where the textual critical notes and the threefold ministry of Jesus: preaching, teaching, and healing are highlighted. The third section deals with the theological analysis of the text with its practical implications and its application. This article brings to light the richness of the theme of Healing Messiah as Matthew focuses it in the summary statements.

2. PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF MATT 4:23-25

The Gospel of Matthew can be divided into five parts: (i) the prehistory of the child Jesus (1:1-2:23), (ii) the ministry in and around Galilee (3:1-21:11), (iii) Jesus in the Temple (21:12-17), (iv) the ministry, passion, and death in Jerusalem (21:12-28:15), and (v) the great commission of

¹ K. Paffenroth, "Jesus as Anointed and Healing Son of God in the Gospel of Matthew," *Biblica* 80 (1999) 547-554.

² S. Mulloparambil, *Messianic Rejection and Matthean Redaction* (Bangalore, 2007) 9.

the risen Jesus (28:16-20).³ Matthew 4:23-25 is a literary unit that closes one door and opens another. It concludes Mt 3-4 and at the same time introduces Mt 5-7. Verses 23-25 are also carefully formulated from a compositional perspective and, along with 5:1-2; 7:28-8:1; and 8:16, create a frame around the Sermon on the Mount.⁴ There are three reasons to say that this pericope (Mt 4:23-25) is a separate text. The first is **Movement**: The stage has been carefully set. Jesus has been fully prepared through the baptism and temptations; he has moved to the north, where the prophet Isaiah said the fulfilment would begin; the summarizing rubric of the kingdom of heaven over all of Jesus' work has been spoken by him as it had by John the Baptist (Mt 4:17); and the disciples have been called. Now we encounter what is simultaneously a programmatic and summarizing statement of the ministry of Jesus before we embark upon Matthew's proper account of that teaching and healing ministry in detail.⁵ Here, we note that, in Mt 4:23, the movement is that of Jesus out to Israel, while in 4:24, the fame of Jesus spreads beyond Galilee, and in 4:25, a movement of people towards Jesus takes place.⁶ The second is **Theme**: In this pericope (Mt 4:23-25), Jesus' work is more aptly summed up as teaching, preaching, and healing

³ S. Mulloparambil, *Macrostructure of Matthew's Gospel* (Bangalore, 2011) 30.

⁴ J. A. Comber, "Critical Notes: The Verb Therapeuo in Matthew's Gospel," *JBL* 97 (1978) 431-434.

⁵ D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (WBC 33A; Dallas, TX 1993) 79.

⁶ Comber, "Critical Notes: The Verb Therapeuo in Matthew's Gospel," 432.

in a more general sense. Among all these three themes what is central is the theme of ‘healing.’ The verb θεραπεύω, “to heal,” occurs sixteen times in Matthew, more than in any other New Testament book.⁷ Interestingly, in this pericope there are two occurrences of the word θεραπεύω (Mt 4:23, 24).⁸ In this way, the pericope hangs on the central theme of our study ‘healing’ in verse 24. The third is *Inclusio*: It is remarkable that Mt 4:23 is repeated almost verbatim in Mt 9:35. The only differences are that Mt 9:35 has “all the cities and villages” for “the whole of Galilee” and omits the final words “among the people.” In fact, the summary of Mt 9:35 functions as an *inclusio* with the present passage, enclosing the account of Jesus’ teaching in chapters 5-7 and his healing in chapters 8-9.⁹ This pericope (Mt 4:23-25) is a Matthean first condensed summary before he reports any details of Jesus’ teaching and healing activity. In this pericope, the Matthean catchword “Galilee” (Γαλιλαία) functions as an *inclusio*. There is a mention of Galilee in verse 23 and in verse 25. Because of these three reasons, we have delimited our study to Mt 4:23-25.

2.1. THE STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

Verse 23 anticipates the structure of these chapters: “The Messiah of the word, the one who preaches, is portrayed in chapters 5-7; the Messiah of the deed, the one who heals, is portrayed in chapters 8-9. With the catchwords

⁷ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 80.

⁸ D. C. Duling, “The Therapeutic Son of David: An Element in Matthew’s Christological Apologetic,” *NTS* 24 (1978) 392-410.

⁹ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 79.

rational impulses, perpetual prayer and assisting of one's fellow-men.³⁰ He does not want to enter into the prayer life of the monks; instead he is interested in their physical endurance, living in the open-air, exposed to burning heat and snow in the winter. All these acts were complimented through simplicity, mildness, modesty and gentleness of speech. Thus, the life of Theodoret's *idāyā* points to the fact that human beings can overcome temptations and participate in the angelic life in this world and this led them to access God.

Exposed to outer world- The divine power in a solitary gives him the confidence and the heavenly grace to move out to the world of the needy. Imitating the life of Christ, an *iḥidāyā* takes the responsibility to be with the people.³¹ Coming down from the mountain he humbly serves others in the valley. Their access to the world was a channel between humanity and the Divine that worked in both directions. They are the point of contact where the human and the Divine meet. They carry the images of Physicians, Prophets, Apostles, Instructors, Meditators and Church leaders.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN THE EGYPTIAN AND THE SYRIAC MONASTICISM

The Egyptian monasticism is rich in solitary and community living. Their pattern of life characterizes as follows:

HR, R. M. Price, tr., xxii.

HR IX: 4, P. Canivet, ed., SC 234, 412.

Here, Matthew's fondness for the triad seems evident. In 4:23, Jesus does three things. In 4:24 a,b,c, three things happen. In 4:24c, three types of sufferers are named.¹¹ Keeping in mind, the Matthew's fondness for the triad, I would like to propose the structure with these three verses (Mt 4:23-25):

v.23 A – Jesus goes about all Galilee

v.24 B – Jesus heals them

v.25 A' – Great crowds follow Jesus from Galilee

The well-arranged structure sheds light on the importance of the pericope and gives hints to interpret the passage. At the centre of the structure stands the healing by Jesus, an evident messianic sign. The verb *θεραπεύω* is very important to Matthew. Matthew's favourite vocabulary at the centre of the concentric arrangement shows that the pattern is intended by him.¹²

2.2. THE LITERARY FORM OF THE TEXT

Matthew 4:23-25 constitute a redactional summary which draws on Mk 1:39 and 3:7-12 (also 1:14-15, 21, 28, 32-4; 6:6). It is the first of several such summaries,¹³ the

¹¹ D. C. Davies – W. D. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (ICC 1; Edinburgh, 1988) 410.

¹² Mulloparambil, *Messianic Rejection and Matthean Redaction*, 84.

¹³ The summary statements do not primarily just 'summarize' what has gone before or what will come after; instead, they supply narrative continuity, lengthen the narrative time, expand the geographical setting, create a picture of movement and highlight central themes (C. W. Hedrick, "The Role of 'Summary Statements' in the Composition of the Gospel of Mark: A Dialog With Karl Schmidt and Norman Perrin," *Nov T* 26 (1984) 289-311.

others being 8:16-17; 9:35-38; 12:15-16; 14:13-14; 15:29-31; 19:1-2; 21:14-16.¹⁴ The summary statements by way of the Matthean redaction fulfil literary techniques that unite the narrative.¹⁵ The pericope (Mt 4:23-25) belongs to the literary form of the summary statements. In general, these statements summarize some new aspects of the ministry of Jesus and seem to function as narrative devices that broaden, expand, and intensify the ministry of Jesus and its effect. They are not summaries in the narrow sense that they summarize specific literary segments that precede or follow in the narrative. In short, they give the impression of a broader and more influential ministry than the few brief examples of healings, debates, and teaching episodes narrated by Mark. Without the impression created by the summary passages, one is shocked at the narrowness, brevity and sporadic character of Jesus' ministry reflected in the Gospel.¹⁶

2.3. THE REDACTION OF THE TEXT

Although the summary does not have a parallel in Mark, the tradition-faithful Matthew writes freely at only a few points. While the decisive title sentence of verse 23 is his creation, he closely follows Mark 1:39 in his wording. The basis of verse 24 is Mark 1:28; the basis of verse 24 b,c

¹⁴ G.H. Twelftree, *Jesus The Miracle Worker* (Downers Grove, 1999) 107.

¹⁵ J. C. Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web, Over and Over and Over Again* (Sheffield, 1994) 144.

¹⁶ Hedrick, "The Role of 'Summary Statements' in the Composition of the Gospel of Mark: A Dialog With Karl Schmidt and Norman Perrin," 311.

is Mark 1:32, 34; and the basis of verse 25 is Mark 3:7-8.¹⁷ Thus, the Evangelist surveys large parts of his Markan source and takes excerpts from it. He knows ahead of time precisely which texts from Mark he will omit. He works according to a well-thought-out plan. The exorcism of Mark 1:23-27 is omitted for reasons that are not apparent; it is replaced by the healing summary of Matthew 4:23d.¹⁸

In Matthew 4:23, the Evangelist composes a summary statement through which he introduces the reader to the ministry of Jesus to Israel. Working from Mark 1:39 (Καὶ ἦλθεν κηρύσσων εἰς τὰς συναγωγὰς αὐτῶν εἰς ὅλην τὴν Γαλιλαίαν καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια ἐκβάλλων. *And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons*), Matthew has added references to teaching (διδάσκων) and healing (θεραπεύων), thus developing his special emphasis on the threefold nature of Jesus' ministry to the Jews (Καὶ περιῆγεν ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ διδάσκων ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας καὶ θεραπεύων πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν ἐν τῷ λαῷ. Mt 4:23). Whereas Mark records that "all" the sick were brought to Jesus and that he healed "many" (*And he healed many who were sick*, καὶ ἐθεράπευσεν πολλοὺς κακῶς ἔχοντας ποικίλαις (Mk 1:34), Matthew records many were brought to Jesus, and he healed them "all" (Mt 4:24).¹⁹ Therefore, the Matthean redactional trait clearly presents Jesus' authority to heal all the sick. His

¹⁷ Davies – Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 412.

¹⁸ U. Luz, *Matthew 1-7* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, 2007) 165.

¹⁹ Mulloparambil, *Messianic Rejection and Matthean Redaction*, 191.

interest is to present a messiah who works miracles, heals the sick and gives powerful signs.

Through the preliminary analyses of Matthew 4:23-25, we understand that this pericope is a carefully constructed and theologically sound passage with the theme of healing messiah.

3. AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF MATT 4:23-25

The pericope (Mt 4:23-25) points to the rapid growth of the ministry of Jesus. Verse 23 describes the ministry of Jesus using three parallel participles, διδάσκων, κηρύσσων, and θεραπεύων, "teaching," "preaching," and "healing". Verse 24 describes the result by referring to the spread of his fame and then listing the various types of maladies he removed from the people. Verse 25, in turn, refers to the growing number of followers Jesus gained, listing the regions from which they came. In the last list, references to Galilee and "across the Jordan" remind us of the citation of Isa 8:23-9:1. Likewise, this pericope is rich with many themes, especially with healing messiah. Through the exegetical analysis, let us explore this pericope to better understand the text.

3.1. TEXTUAL CRITICAL NOTES

23 Καὶ περιῆγενα ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ διδάσκων ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας καὶ θεραπεύων πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν ἐν τῷ λαῷ.

24 Καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ἡ ἀκοὴ αὐτοῦ εἰς ὅλην τὴν Συρίαν· καὶ προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ πάντα τοὺς κακῶς ἔχοντας ποικίλαις

νόσοις καὶ βασάνοις συνεχομένους [καὶ] δαιμονιζομένους καὶ σεληνιαζομένους καὶ παραλυτικούς, καὶ ἐθεράπευσεν αὐτούςb.

25 καὶ ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ ὄχλοι πολλοὶ ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ Δεκαπόλεως καὶ Ἱεροσολύμων καὶ Ἰουδαίας καὶ πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου.²⁰

23a. The GNT notes that, the revised text of Ⲙ (Codex Sinaiticus), the Western text D (Codex Bezae), Sys (Sinaitic Syriac), Syp (Syriac Peshitta) have ὁ Ἰησοῦς. B (Codex Vaticanus) witnesses to the shorter and more difficult syntax with no specified subject.²¹

24b. The GNT mentions that D (Codex Bezae), it (many old Latin manuscripts), Syc (Curetonian Syriac) read καὶ πάντας ἐθεράπευσεν, "and he healed them all."

3.2. JESUS WENT THROUGH GALILEE (v.23)

The sources for this phrase, which places all initiative with Jesus, appear to be Mk 1:39 (καὶ ἦλθεν κηρύσσων εἰς τὰς συναγωγὰς αὐτῶν εἰς ὅλην τὴν Γαλιλαίαν) and 6:6b (καὶ περιῆγεν τὰς κόμας κύκλω διδάσκων). The verb, περιάγω (here in the imperfect: the action of unspecified duration is continuous) also occurs in another redactional summary, 9:35. It makes Jesus, unlike the typical prophets of Israel

²⁰ For the translation, we follow the NRSV.

²¹ In order to identify the subject of the verb περιῆγεν, various manuscripts insert ὁ Ἰησοῦς in different positions (in the Greek lectionary system, verse 23 begins a new pericope). The accusative ὅλην τὴν Γαλιλαίαν in D and many later manuscripts is an adaptation to the more usual construction after περιῆγεν. (B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London, 1975) 12.

and rabbis but not certain Hellenistic philosophers, an itinerant wanderer (23:15). Perhaps it sets an example for Christian evangelists (10:23; 28:19).²²

In keeping with the tradition (Mk 6:6), Matthew has Jesus' wander around Galilee. The Evangelist refers the beginning sentence ("he went about in all Galilee") to everything that follows up to the equally emphasized new beginning in 19:1 ("he went away from Galilee"). The composition shows that he imagines Jesus initially in the area around his residence in Capernaum (8:5; 9:1). Jesus' teaching "in their synagogues" suggests two things: Jesus turns to Israel and teaches in the synagogues as a teacher of Israel just as his miracle-working activity is for the chosen people. At the same time, however, the emphasis: "their synagogues" clarifies that the Evangelist and his community are located outside. Matthew had already indicated in 3,2 and 4,17 the content of the proclamation: it calls for repentance considering the imminent kingdom.²³ Verse 23 tersely describes the ministry of Jesus using three parallel participles, διδάσκων, κηρύσσων, and θεραπεύων, "teaching," "preaching," and "healing."²⁴

3.2.1. TEACHING (ΔΙΔΑΣΚΩΝ)

The verb διδάσκω occurs almost 100 times in the New Testament, but 75 of the occurrences are found in the

²² Davies – Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 412.

²³ J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI 2005) 204.

²⁴ Comber, "Critical Notes: The Verb Therapeuo in Matthew's Gospel," 432.

Gospels and Acts, and another 16 in the Pauline corpus.²⁵ In about a dozen passages, διδάσκω is used as a comprehensive term for Jesus' preaching (Mt 4:23; Mk 2:13; Lk 4:15); elsewhere it denotes his ministry in given situations. In any case, all the Gospels make clear that Jesus often "taught" publicly, that is in synagogues (Mt 9:35; Mk 6:2), in the Temple (Mk 12:35; Lk 21:37; Jn 18:20), or in the open air (Mt 5:2; Lk 5:3). The content of Jesus' teaching focused on God, his kingdom, and his will.²⁶ Although the use of διδάσκω is essentially the same in all the Gospels, particular emphases concerning the content of Jesus' teaching are evident. In Matthew, the focus seems to lie on the training of Jesus' disciples, as is apparent from the prominence given to the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). Here, Jesus is the teacher of the Church who supersedes the Sinaitic revelation and its rabbinic interpretations ("you have heard that it was said to the people long ago," 5:21) to lay a new foundation ("But I tell you," 5:22). The foundation guaranteed by him is not an innovative law but the true fulfilment of the old, now freed from rabbinic distortions. Only now does the original intention of the law become clear. The follower of Jesus is called not to lawlessness but to superior righteousness (5:19), the foundation of which is the law in the light of Christ's fulfilment (5:17-18). This is why, after his resurrection, this interpretation must be passed on through teaching (28:20).²⁷

²⁵ M. Silva, "διδάσκω," *NIDNTTE* 1:710.

²⁶ Luz, *A Commentary on Matthew 1-7*, 165.

²⁷ M. Silva, "διδάσκω," *NIDNTTE* 1:711.

3.2.2. PREACHING (ΚΗΡΥΣΣΩΝ)

Matthew uses κηρύσσω nine times in his Gospel. The object of this verb is "τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας," the "gospel of the kingdom" (Mt 4:23; 9:35; 24:14). The Phrase in Mark 1:4, "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins," includes both the means and the end.²⁸ Matthew and Luke develop this aspect further with some examples of John's teaching. However, all three Gospels,²⁹ record that the Baptist's preaching extended to the announcement of the coming stronger one through whose Spirit-baptism a new order will begin (Mt 3:11; Mk 1:7; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:26-27).³⁰ Matthew inserts at this point as the factor that legitimates and motivates John's proclamation the sentence, "for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Mt 3:2). This means that John's call to repentance is set against the background of the promised lordship of Christ. This is why Jesus takes it up in the same words (4:17) and then emphasizes it as the centre of the message, the disciples are to proclaim (10:7). Jesus himself thus moves into the area, as it were, between the Testaments, into the centre of time. Just as the prophets, represented by John, have pointed forward to his coming, before he establishes the signs of the kingdom (summaries in 4:23; 9:35; 11:1), so also the disciples bear witness to its drawing, as something that has

²⁸ Friedrich, "κηρύσσω," *TDNT* 3:700.

²⁹ The synoptic Gospels all use κηρύσσω for the activity of John the Baptist (Mt 3:1; Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3), suggesting that he is the last of the prophets (an allusion to Isaiah 40:3) (C. S. Albright – W. F. Mann, *Matthew* (AB; New York, 1971) 43.

³⁰ Albright – Mann, *Matthew*, 44.

already happened and is now present in their proclamation (10:40; 24:12). Thus, Matthew uses κηρύσσω concerning what may be called the "official" proclamation of John, Jesus, and the disciples expressly set out by him. This preaching occurs in the synagogues, the desert, and the villages, and even among the Gentiles (24:14).³¹

Matthew, for his part, links κηρύσσω with διδάσκω several times (Mt 4:23; 9:35; 11:1). The activity of Jesus is comprehensively depicted: "he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness" (Mt 4:23; Mk 1:39). When Jesus sent out his disciples, he charged them to preach and heal (Lk 9:2; Mk 3:14). If preaching is a true proclamation in which God is at work so that his rule is a reality, signs and wonders occur. It is not that miracles usher in the new age. Miracles occur because God's efficacious word has declared the divine rule, and in it, everything is sound and well. Hence, the important thing is the message which affects the signs and wonders. Jesus is the teacher par excellence, and in Matthew, the verb διδάσκω is not applied to the disciples until the Great Commission (28:20). Thus, the event of proclamation is surrounded by objective instruction that makes known the dawn and the power of the new age.³²

³¹ Moises Silva, "κηρύσσω," *NIDNTTE* 2:679.

³² Friedrich, "κηρύσσω," *TDNT* 3:700.

3.2.3. HEALING (ΘΕΡΑΠΕΥΩΝ)

There is no sickness or weakness that Jesus cannot master. This is the basic thought in all the stories of his healings. Men come from all sides to be cured of their sufferings, and Jesus heals them (Mt 4:24; 14:14).³³ Mark and Luke use the verb *θεραπεύω*,³⁴ in their parallels to Mt 4:24 (Mark 3:10 and Luke 6:18), but Matthew develops the description of the healing ministry in considerable detail. In Mt 9:35, the Evangelist repeats the summary statement of the ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing. A glance at the parallels to Mark 9:35 (Mk 6:6 and Lk 10:1) shows that Mt 9:35, like 4:23, is a carefully composed and placed Matthean formula. Four uses of *θεραπεύω* are found in the context of Jesus healing the Jewish crowds: Mt 14:14; 15:30; 19:2; 21:14. Mt 14:14 is paralleled in Mark (Mk 6:34) with the important exception of the main verb. In Mark, Jesus' pity for the crowds finds expression in his teaching them. In Matthew, Jesus responds to the crowd by healing. In Matthew's scheme of things, Jesus no longer teaches the Jews or preaches the kingdom to them after Mt 11:1. However, he continues to heal, and the Jewish crowds are frequently the recipients of this ministry. The third mention of the crowds flocking to Jesus and his response in healing their sick, is found only in Matthew 15:30. In Mt

³³ H. W. Beyer, "θεραπεύω," *TDNT* 3:130.

³⁴ In the New Testament, the word *θεραπεύω* is never used in the secular sense of "to serve." It is much more often used in the sense of "to heal," and always in such a way that the reference is not to medical treatment, which might fail, but to real healing (H. C. Kee, "Medicine and Healing," *ABD* 4:662).

19:2, Matthew follows Mark in his narrative (Mk 10:1). But, as in Mt 14:14, Matthew here makes a significant alteration in his source: Jesus does not teach the crowds; he heals them. Although Mt 21:14 contains no specific reference to the crowds, the language of this verse, reminiscent of Mt 15:30, clearly reflects the image of Jesus exercising his healing ministry amid this group.³⁵

Jesus' healing stands alongside the teaching. The Evangelist emphasizes that all the sick were brought to Jesus and healed every sickness. He treats Jesus' healing miracles as a "normal" activity. The word *θεραπεύω* appears 16 times in the Gospel of Matthew.³⁶ In the Gospels, the work of Jesus is presented in terms of teaching and performing healing miracles (Lk 6:18). Although the supernatural cures play an essential part in Christ's work, they must be seen in the context of his teaching if they are to be understood aright. This correction is especially clear from the arrangement of the Gospel of Matthew, where the two great collections of Jesus' teaching (Mt 5-7) and his miracles (Mt 8-9) are enclosed between two almost identical verses: Jesus was "teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing (*θεραπεύων*) every disease and sickness" (Mt 4:23 and 9:35).³⁷ Jesus' healing powers were also manifested through exorcisms (Mt 8:16; Mk 1:34). These acts revealed his messianic claims in a

³⁵ Comber, "Critical Notes: The Verb *Therapeuo* in Matthew's Gospel," 432.

³⁶ H. W. Beyer, "θεραπεύω," *TDNT* 3:130.

³⁷ H. W. Beyer, "θεραπεύω," *TDNT* 3:131.

dramatic fashion. Satanic forces were subject to his power and word, and by exercising authority over the demons through his word, he was utterly different from the ordinary exorcists of his time.³⁸

As he cast out demons, people could glimpse the splendour of Christ the King (Mt 12:28). While Jesus, again and again, heals the sick (Mt 4:24; 12:15; 14:14; 15:30), this does not put him into the category of the Hellenistic "divine men" who in their acts of healing demonstrated their divine abilities; rather, the Servant of the Lord fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies by his healing miracles (Mt 8:16-17; Isa 53:4).³⁹ The healings do not prove Jesus to be the Christ, but viewed against their OT background, they are seen as Christ's act of obedience and thus a necessary element in his messianic work. This conviction lies behind the many summaries that emphasize Jesus' willingness and ability to heal all who came to him with physical needs (Mt 4:24; 19:12).⁴⁰ Jesus healed *πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν*⁴¹ ἐν τῷ λαῷ, "every disease and every malady among the people." In 8:17, Matthew will quote Isa 53:4 as being fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus: "he bore our diseases," where the word for "diseases" (νόσους) is the same as that

³⁸ W. Grimm, "θεραπεύω," *EDNT* 2:143.

³⁹ H. W. Beyer, "θεραπεύω," *TDNT* 3:133.

⁴⁰ M. Silva, "θεραπεύω," *NIDNTTE* 2:246.

⁴¹ The word *μαλακία* appears in the New Testament only in Matthew and may mean "weakness" in contrast to the stronger term "sickness." The biblical colouring fits well the statement that Jesus heals the sickness "among the people," that is in Israel, the people of God. (Luz, *A Commentary on Matthew 1-7*, 166).

used here. Although the phrase "every disease and malady," which also occurs in 10,1 in the commissioning of the twelve just before their mission, is hyperbolic rather than literal, Jesus healed multitudes of their illnesses.⁴²

3.3. THEY BROUGHT TO HIM ALL THE SICK (v.24)

The language is absolute here because it describes something of fundamental importance. We note in v 24, "they brought to him all" their sick, with the implication that Jesus healed them all (although here the Evangelist avoids using πάντας, "all," with ἐθεράπευσεν, "he healed"). A further illustration of this whole perspective is "the whole of Galilee" and "the whole of Syria" (v 24).⁴³ With the three catchwords "demon possessed", "epileptics" and "paralytics." Matthew indicates healings to which he will later return (8:28-34; 9:1-8; 17:14-21). Matthew's "all Syria"⁴⁴ here, while even less likely to be meant literally than "all Galilee" in v. 23, serves to indicate that Jesus' reputation spread far beyond the area of his actual travels. The three terms that conclude the list will be illustrated by specific cases in 8:28-34; 17:14-21, and 9:1-8, respectively. An exact medical diagnosis is not to be expected or attempted based on such a general summary. Still, we should

⁴² Paffenroth, "Jesus as Anointed and Healing Son of God in the Gospel of Matthew," 550.

⁴³ Luz, *A Commentary on Matthew 1-7*, 166.

⁴⁴ The Roman imperial province of Syria included not only the Syria (Aram) of the OT but also Palestine (Syria Palestina); the Herodian rulers and the prefect of Judea, as well as the cities of the Decapolis, were subject to the overall authority of the legate of Syria (Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 204).

note that modern interpreters often regarded demon-possession as a pre-scientific explanation for what we would describe as a physical or mental disorder, which is listed as a separate category. In using the verb "heal" to cover all the complaints recorded, Matthew is not as careful as Mark in 1:32-34 (3:10-12) to differentiate possession, with "expulsion" as its cure, from physical illnesses which are "healed," but in his other general summaries he maintains the distinction clearly (8:16; 10:1, 8); where he mentions physical symptoms in a case of demon-possession in 9:32-34, the language remains clearly that of exorcism, though in 12:22 a more abbreviated account speaks simply of "healing."⁴⁵

3.3.1. DISEASED AND PAINS (ΝΟΣΟΙΣ ΚΑΙ ΒΑΣΑΝΟΙΣ)

The list of sicknesses healed by Jesus is comprehensive, beginning with the general (v 23) "those who were ill (τοὺς κακῶς ἔχοντας; 8:16; 9:12; 14:35), those tormented with various diseases (ποικίλαις νόσοις; 8:17; 9:35; 10:1) and pains (καὶ βασάνοις; only here in Matthew)" and then proceeding to the particular and more spectacular healings of the demon-possessed (δαιμονιζομένους; 8:16, 28, 33; 9:32; 12:22), those subject to seizures (σεληνιαζομένους), and the paralyzed (παραλυτικούς; 8:6; 9:2, 6). That this can be closely associated with demon possession is indicated in 17:14-21, where a person suffering this disease is cured of it by the exorcism of a demon. Specific examples of the curing of the demon-possessed

⁴⁵ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI 2007) 285.

(8:28-34; 9:32-34; 12:22-24; and 15:22-28) and the paralyzed (8:5-13; 9:2-8) occur later in Matthew.⁴⁶ The listing is not particularly intended to specify disease types; it is rather to underline the massive range and scale of Jesus' healing activity.⁴⁷

3.3.2. EPILEPTICS AND PARALYTICS (ΣΕΛΗΝΙΑΖΟΜΕΝΟΥΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΑΡΑΛΥΤΙΚΟΥΣ)

The rare word *σεληνιαζομένους* means moon-struck and seems to refer to epilepsy (Mt 17:15), which the ancients must have supposed was caused by the moon (Ps 121:6).⁴⁸ The English lunacy is from the Latin *luna*, and it is worth observing that many moderns still believe that violence increases during a full moon. Given the possible connection between epilepsy and demons, it may be that the first two items in our list (bodily diseases and pains) are followed by two illnesses caused by supernatural influences (demon-possession and epilepsy).⁴⁹ The word *παρλυτικούς* occurs only in a few passages (Mt 4:24; 8:5-10; 9:1-8; and Mk 2:1-2). This rarity seems to underscore the severity of the condition in the ancient world.⁵⁰ The instances of paralysis from the gospels give every indication of resulting

⁴⁶ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 81.

⁴⁷ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 204.

⁴⁸ The word used points to folk belief that the influence of the moon was involved, and it may well have a wider reference than to epilepsy (Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 205).

⁴⁹ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 73.

⁵⁰ N. W. Duran, "Paralysis," *NIDB* 1:381.

from organic disease of the central nervous system. It is also believed that the emotional state of guilt or conflict results in physical symptoms of paralysis or blindness.⁵¹ Jesus heals them.

3.3.3. HE HEALED THEM (ἘΘΕΡΑΠΕΥΣΕΝ ΑΥΤΟΥΣ)

“He healed them” means not ‘he treated them medically.’ In the Gospel of Matthew, the verb θεραπεύω usually connotes mercy and compassion.⁵² ἔθεράπευσεν αὐτούς occurs only once in Luke 4:40, never in Mark, five times in Matthew: 4:24; 12:15; 15:30; 19:2; 21:14 always in summary material.⁵³ In any event, it seems that our Evangelist is concerned to present Jesus as the Messiah who heals every disease and infirmity and that this concern has to do with a desire to see scripture fulfilled (8:16-17 quoting Isaiah 53:4; and 11:4-6 quoting or alluding to Isa 26:19; 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 42:18; 66:1).⁵⁴

⁵¹ R. K. Harrison, “Disease,” *IDB* 1:849.

⁵² Davies – Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 414.

⁵³ Paffenroth, “Jesus as Anointed and Healing Son of God in the Gospel of Matthew,” 553.

⁵⁴ Davies – Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 412.

3.4. GREAT CROWDS FOLLOWED HIM (v.25)

ὄχλοι⁵⁵ πολλοί, "large crowds", refers to the large number who "followed" him, some of whom but not all, were genuine in their discipleship. This is also the case elsewhere in the Gospel where, ὄχλοι "crowds" is linked with the verb ἀκολουθέω "to follow."⁵⁶ Among the crowds, there were true disciples in addition to the twelve special disciples. The list of places from which these followers came is comprehensive: Galilee, where the ministry was centred, comes first; the Decapolis referring to the area south and east of the sea of Galilee; and from further south, namely Jerusalem and Judea, as well as Transjordan. Galilee and "across the Jordan" (πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου) echo the original citation of Isaiah 8:23-9:1. If we add to this list Syria as the northern area, we have a rather full and symbolic representation of that region of the world, that is, the whole of Israel.⁵⁷

The verb ἀκολουθέω occurs 90 times in the New Testament. Matthew uses it 25 times. The Gospels simply

⁵⁵ In 4:25 and 5:1 Matthew speaks of ὄχλοι, not as in 4:23 of the λαός. Of course, he means de facto large masses of people from Israel. But he chooses his words very carefully: Jesus performs his healings in and for the holy nation/people (λαός). However, it is not the holy nation that follows him but the ὄχλοι. The evangelist thus accomplishes different things: he can emphasize Jesus' great success with very many people from Israel (plural). At the same time the term ὄχλος is more neutral than λαός and is more suitable for understanding the people who "follow" as the potential church (Hagner, *matthew 1-13*, 79).

⁵⁶ W. Carter, "Matthew 4:18-22 and Matthean Discipleship: An Audience-Oriented Perspective", *CBQ* 59 (1997) 58-75.

⁵⁷ HAGNER, *Matthew 1-13*, 79.

describe the crowds as following Jesus (Mt 4:25; Mk 5:24; Lk 7:9; Jn 6:2), ἀκολουθέω is used in a neutral sense: no participial calling or conviction can be inferred from the people's behaviour. A transition from this general and literal meaning to the sense "be a disciple" can be detected in John 1,37-45.⁵⁸

3.4.1. GALILEE (ΓΑΛΙΛΑΪΑΣ)

The focus on Galilee has been very important for Matthew from v.12. At this point, while continuing to report a Galilean ministry, he wants to transcend the parochial focus that this might imply. Matthew's approach suggests that while Jesus moves out from Nazareth and Capernaum to extend the scope of his ministry to the whole of Galilee, the movement of others also plays a part. The effective scope of Jesus' ministry becomes coextensive with historic Israel because people come from all the other parts of where he is in Galilee.⁵⁹

3.4.2. DECAPOLIS (ΔΕΚΑΠΟΛΕΩΣ)

Decapolis, the group of ten Hellenistic cities east of the Jordan (except Scythopolis) and south of the Sea of Galilee, probably received its name sometime in the first century B.C.E. It is mentioned only once in Matthew, only twice in Mark (5:20; 7:31), and nowhere else in the OT or NT. The ten cities—Damascus, Philadelphia, Raphana, Scythopolis, Gadara, Hippos, Dion, Pella, Galasa, Canatha, belonged to

⁵⁸ M. SILVA, "ἀκολουθέω", *NIDNTTE* 1:205.

⁵⁹ NOLLAND, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 205.

the Roman province of Syria.⁶⁰ Within the context of Matthew's Gospel, are we to think of it as the home of Gentiles? Probably not, for in Matthew's mind, 'the land of Israel' (2:20-21) could consist of all the places named in 4:25.⁶¹

3.4.3. JUDEA AND ACROSS THE JORDAN

Before recounting any of the details of Jesus' healing ministry, the Evangelist wants to present a major teaching discourse of Jesus. But the teaching of Jesus must be set in the larger context of his ministry, and thus at the outset, it is necessary for him to encapsulate the ministry of Jesus. Jesus' teaching and preaching were done in the context of a healing ministry that, as emphasized later in the Gospel, pointed to the validity of his message. Jesus thus heals the multitudes of every kind of disease, including those stemming from the spiritual world of the demons.⁶² Consequently, at least initially, he gathers a large following from the surrounding and even somewhat distant areas. Matthew manages to cover the compass Galilee (NW), the Decapolis (NE), Judea (SW), Transjordan (SE)—as well as name the centre of the world, Jerusalem.⁶³

The Evangelist wants us quickly to sense the great excitement surrounding Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, where he began to preach "the good news of the

⁶⁰ HARRINGTON, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 75.

⁶¹ HAGNER, *Matthew 1-13*, 81.

⁶² Nolland, *The Gospel Of Matthew: A Commentary On The Greek Text*, 204.

⁶³ Davies – Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 412.

kingdom" before presenting him in more detail as the master teacher (chaps. 5–7) and charismatic healer (chaps. 8–9). The healing ministry of Jesus pointed out by this pericope (Mt 4:23-25) is closely linked to the kingdom's arrival. It indicates the realization of Jesus' message concerning the kingdom. The evidence of the kingdom's presence is the healing of the sick.

4. THE THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF MATT 4:23-25

The pericope (Mt 4:23-25) is the foundation for the healing (θεραπεύων) ministry of Jesus, for the words and deeds of Jesus also belong together. In this summary account, the mission of Jesus is presented as "proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing" (Mt 4:23). By so doing, Matthew emphasizes that Jesus is a teacher who is at the same time healer.⁶⁴ Through the theological analyses of this pericope, let us bring to light the theological significance of the threefold ministry of Jesus and the relevance of the theme of healing messiah.

4.1. THE MESSIAH OF THE WORD

The pericope (Mt 4:23-25) gives us, in brief, an overview of Jesus' ministry to Israel (he preached, he taught, he healed). It tells us that the disciples were not the only ones to hear Jesus. So did the crowds. Before the crowds hear the Messiah's word, they are the object of his compassion and healing. Having done nothing, nothing at all, they are benefited. So, grace comes before task, succour

⁶⁴ I. H. Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL 2004) 98.

before demand, healing before imperative. The first act of the Messiah is not the imposition of his commandments but the giving of himself. Today's command presupposes yesterday's gift.⁶⁵

4.2. THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ΚΗΡΥΣΣΩΝ

Matthew uses κηρύσσω in a manner parallel to Markan usage (Mk 1:14; 4:17; 13:10; 14:9), but omits the proclamation by the healed man (Mk 1:45; 5:20), probably in consideration of the stronger Christological concentration of Matthean miracle stories in comparison to Mark and the lack of regard for the Markan idea of the "messianic secret."⁶⁶ In 9:35, parallel to Mark 6:6, Matthew brings into play the proclamation by Jesus, while in 10:7, the discourse associated with the limited commission, formed from Mark and Q, accents the mandate for proclamation by the disciples. In each instance, κηρύσσω is used.⁶⁷ Matthew also recognizes the post-easter situation as it relates to the proclamation, and in the redactional shaping of 10:7, the κηρύσσω of the disciples is assimilated to that of John the Baptist and Jesus (3:1; 4:17). The apparent orientation of κηρύσσω toward John the Baptist, Jesus, and the disciples indicates the author's conception of this verb in relation to the Church.⁶⁸ The object of κηρύσσω is εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας (the Gospel of the kingdom). This is characteristic

⁶⁵ D. J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville 1991) 73.

⁶⁶ Friedrich, "κηρύσσω," *TDNT* 3:701.

⁶⁷ O. Merk, "κηρύσσω," *EDNT* 2:290.

⁶⁸ O. Merk, "κηρύσσω," *EDNT* 2:290.

of Matthew. Jesus' speech (which cannot be sundered from his deeds: the latter incarnate the former) constitutes the Gospel.⁶⁹ Further, it is extremely difficult to distinguish between Jesus' preaching and his teaching, although some have thought otherwise. Both have as their content the Messiah's words and deeds, and this is why they are so closely joined in 4:23; 9:35, and 11:1. Thus, teaching and preaching appear nearly synonymous.⁷⁰

4.3. THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ΔΙΔΑΣΚΩΝ

In Matthew, Jesus as the teacher, stands in the centre from the beginning (4:23; 9:35; 11:1). On the other hand, it appears that Matthew consistently avoids addressing Jesus as a teacher, in contrast to Mark. The word διδάσκαλε, like the address *rabbi*, occurs only in the mouth of non-disciples (8:19; 12:38; 19:16), while the disciples address Jesus as κύριε (8:25; 17:15).⁷¹ Such changes from the Markan original are based not on a lack of interest in Jesus as a teacher but on the fact that Jesus is no teacher in the Jewish sense, according to Matthew; consequently, for Matthew's Gospel as a whole, there is a fundamental contrast between the teaching of Jesus and that of Judaism. Likewise, in contrast to Mark, Matthew defines the content of the teaching of Jesus in the sense of teaching of the law or

⁶⁹. That is, the Messiah's revelatory words and commands and their complete realization in his deeds and person (26:13) announce and talk about God's activity (the kingdom) and are good news (O. MERK, "κηρύσσω," 290).

⁷⁰. Davies – Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 412.

⁷¹. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 79.

making known the will of God, as is indicated programmatically in the Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29).⁷²

4.4. THE MESSIAH OF THE DEED

It is no coincidence that the Sermon on the Mount precedes the mighty acts recounted in chapters 8–9.⁷³ Matthew deliberately speaks of "the deeds of *the Christ*," that is, of works that cause Jesus to be recognized as *the Messiah*. The whole activity of Jesus, teaching, preaching, exorcisms, and healings is messianic.⁷⁴

4.4.1. JESUS HEALS EVERY DISEASES AND INFIRMITIES

The Markan summaries describe Jesus' activity as twofold—Jesus preaches, and he casts out demons (1:39; 3:14-15; 6:12-13). This dual emphasis is reflected in the Gospel as a whole. In Matthew, there is a different accent. Jesus' work is more aptly summed up as teaching and preaching, and healing in a more general sense.⁷⁵ Perhaps in this, Matthew has been influenced by Q (Mt 11,4-6; Lk 7,22-23). In any event, it seems that our Evangelist is concerned to present Jesus as the Messiah who heals all diseases and infirmities and that this concern has to do with a desire to see Scripture fulfilled (Mt 8,16-17, quoting Isa 53,4, and Mt 11,4-6 quoting or alluding to Isa 26,19;

⁷² H. F. Weiss, "διδάσκω," *EDNT* 1:318.

⁷³ Davies – Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 413.

⁷⁴ Mulloparambil, *Messianic Rejection and Matthean Redaction*, 198.

⁷⁵ D. C. Duling, "The Therapeutic Son of David: An Element in Matthew's Christological Apologetic", *NTS* 24 (1978) 392-410.

29,18-19; 35,5-6; 42,18; 66,1) ⁷⁶.

4.4.2. THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ΘΕΡΑΠΕΥΩ

The detailed accounts on the Gospels demonstrate that θεραπεύω is not used in the Jesus tradition of a therapeutic process in the modern sense, but rather of the effect of the healing deed of Jesus.⁷⁷ The verb occasionally appears in the words of Jesus (Mt 8:7; Lk 14:3), but most often in narrative comments, very frequently in summaries and redactional notes (Mk 1:34; Mt 4:23; 8:16; 12:22; 14:14; Lk 4:40; 5:15; 8:2).⁷⁸ θεραπεύω is used of both exorcistic activities (Mt 4:24; 12:12; Lk 6:18; 8:2) and the removal of bodily ailments such as blindness and lameness (Jn 5:10). This is one reason, among others, that Jesus' healings and exorcisms of demons are not to be sharply distinguished. The acts of healing are not described as interruptions of casual connections within natural law but rather as manifestations of the kingdom of God in the struggle of the powers (Mt 11:2-6; 12:28). They are mentioned alongside the proclamation of the Gospel (Mt 4:23; 9:35).⁷⁹ Jesus' θεραπεύω is the saving of life and the restoration of the creation (Mk 3:2; 8:25; Lk 13:13). Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees regarding the sabbath reveals two different

⁷⁶ Davies – Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 412.

⁷⁷ New Testament usage is linked to the last stage of the linguistic development in the Greek-speaking world, where θεραπεύω can mean "serve" and then also in view of the service of physicians "serve a sick person", "give medical treatment," (H. W. Beyer, "θεραπεύω," *TDNT* 3:129).

⁷⁸ W. Grimm, "θεραπεύω," *EDNT* 2:143.

⁷⁹ O. Merk, "κηρύσσω," *EDNT* 2:290.

understandings of θεραπεύω: the Evangelists use θεραπεύω to denote prophetically proclaimed (Is 26:19; 35:5) saving event (Lk 13:13; Jn 5:9); whereas the Pharisees think of a secular medical activity, one forbidden on the sabbath (Lk 13:4; Jn 5:9).⁸⁰

4.5. LARGE CROWDS FOLLOW JESUS, THE HEALING MESSIAH

These large "crowds" are said to "follow" Jesus, the same term in vv. 20 and 22 denoted the first disciples' total change of lifestyle and will in 8:19-22 similarly indicate a radical commitment to accompany Jesus. Yet as the narrative progresses, we shall find only a few who are Jesus' constant and committed companions, while a less easily defined "crowd" comes and goes. This wider group represents a pool of possible "full-time" recruits, but generally, their "following" seems to be more sporadic and temporary, and when Jesus sets off for Jerusalem in 16:21, it is only the Twelve (and the women mentioned in 27:55-56) who are prepared to leave Galilee to accompany him. The distinction between "disciples" and "crowd" will be maintained in 5:1-2 and 7:28-29. Therefore, the verb "follow" alone is not a sufficient indication of full-scale discipleship.⁸¹

4.5.1. THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ΑΚΟΛΟΥΘΕΩ

The verb ἀκολουθέω means follow, go behind someone. In the New Testament, both meanings are used with Jesus as the object. In the Gospels, ἀκολουθέω is

⁸⁰ W. Grimm, "θεραπεύω," *EDNT* 2:144.

⁸¹ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 286.

always related to Jesus as the object of following in discipleship (Mk 9:38; Lk 22:10; Mt 9:19; Jn 11:31).⁸² The Evangelist speaks about the crowds which followed Jesus after the Galilean beginnings right up to the gates of Jerusalem (Mt 8:1; 12:15; 14:13; 20:29) in such a way that the experience of the miracle follows the mention of discipleship. From this, one can deduce the Evangelist's opinion that it is only by following Jesus that the experience of his miraculous power becomes possible.⁸³

The healings are frequently performed in the context of the crowds following Jesus. The crowds of the gospel narrative are a cypher for the Jewish people of Matthew's time, who are doubtful about following the new direction set by the Pharisees or joining a community of Jewish-Christians such as Matthew's Gospel reflects. In depicting a fundamentally positive relationship between Jesus and the crowds, Matthew indirectly says that his Jewish contemporaries are still the objects of Jesus' beneficence. Matthew appeals to the "Jewish crowds" of his day not to follow the leadership of the Pharisees but to join the fellowship of the disciples of Jesus. Finally, Matthew asks these Jews to accept Jesus as a healing messiah.⁸⁴

⁸² M. Silva, "ἀκολουθέω," *NIDNTTE* 1:205.

⁸³ G. Schneider, "ἀκολουθέω," *EDNT* 1:50.

⁸⁴ Comber, "Critical Notes: The Verb Therapeuo in Matthew's Gospel," 432.

4.5.2. THE UNIVERSALISTIC PERSPECTIVE OF JESUS AS A HEALER

Throughout the biblical tradition, healing is perceived as the work of Yahweh and his divinely empowered agents. In all three sections of Jewish Scriptures, the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Writings, the image of Yahweh as a healer is present as a central aspect of God's relationship to the covenant people. Following God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt by means of the plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea, Yahweh promises that if Israel obeys the commandments of God, the nation will escape all the diseases which beset the Egyptians because "I am Yahweh, your healer" (Ex 15:26). However, it is in the Prophets that Yahweh's role as a healer is most fully represented. In Isaiah, there are repeated appeals to Israel to turn back to God and be healed (Isa 6:10; 19:22; 30:26).⁸⁵ In Isaiah 53:5, however, the suffering of the Servant of Yahweh is to effect healing of God's people. Jeremiah appeals to the nation on God's behalf to return to God to find healing (Jer 3:22). Ezekiel offers the image of Yahweh as healer in a more specific sense in his rebuke of Israel for its failure to care for the sick and the crippled (Ezek 34:4).⁸⁶

The portrait of Jesus as a healer is central to the Gospels. The Gospel of Matthew records nineteen healing and four summary statements naming healing as typical of Jesus' mission. Mark recounts eighteen miracle stories and

⁸⁵ J. B. Green, "Healing," *NIDB* 2:757.

⁸⁶ H. C. Kee, "Medicine and Healing," *ABD* 4:663.

four summaries, and Luke has twenty stories and three summaries. The Gospel of John refers to miracles as "signs," which are numbered five episodes of healing. In the Gospels as a whole, the healing ministry of Jesus identifies Jesus as an agent of God's beneficence and signifies the enactment of God's saving purpose. Each of the Gospels portrays Jesus as a healer with its emphases. Healing stories in Matthew congregate especially in Matthew 8-9, depicting Jesus as one who makes divine blessing available to those on society's margins, a leper, the slave of a Gentile army officer, an older woman, the demon-possessed, a paralytic, a collector of tolls, a young girl, and the blind. The result is an admixture of references to "healing" as a return to physical health, restoration of persons to status within their families and communities, reordering of life around God, and the driving back of demonic forces.⁸⁷ A cleansing of leper allowed him new access to God and the community of God's people (Mt 8:1-4), healing a paralytic was tantamount to forgiving his sins (Mt 9:2-8), extending the grace of God to toll collectors and sinners illustrated the work of the physician (Mt 9:9-13), and recovery of sight signified the insight of faith (Mt 9:27-31). For Matthew, accounts of healing also serve to underscore Christological predicates: Messiah, Lord, Son of David (Mt 8:2; 9:27-31; 20:29-34) and inscribe Jesus' mission into Isaianic anticipation of the new age (Mt 8:17; 11:4-5; Isa 35:6; 53:4; 61:1).⁸⁸

⁸⁷ H. C. Kee, "Medicine and Healing," *ABD* 4:664.

⁸⁸ J. B. Green, "Healing," *NIDB* 2:759.

5. THE RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT TODAY

The pericope (Mt 4:23-25) served the practical purpose of providing an audience for the Sermon on the Mount. By naming places in which the Gospel of Matthew most likely first circulated (Syria, Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, and Judea, beyond the Jordan), Matthew set up a natural identification between his text and its readers. While modern readers cannot experience the same kind of geographical identification that Matthew's first readers did, they can appreciate the major theological themes of Matthew's account of Jesus' early ministry in Galilee: the close relationship between John and Jesus, Jesus' movements in accord with God's will, the extraordinary attractiveness of Jesus in calling his first disciples, and the positive response to him from many different areas.⁸⁹

The pericope (Mt 4:23-25) presents that the people are healed without meeting any requirements or making any confession of faith. It is entirely the initiative and grace of the messianic representative of God's kingdom.⁹⁰ In this way, the Gospel of Matthew extends the perspective of becoming neighbour to the needy as ethical regard to the wretched and deprived ones like the sick, the hungry, the naked, the imprisoned of humanity noticeable in the last judgement discourse in Matthew 25:31-46. Jesus takes the inclusion of these people to a newer realm of symbiotic reciprocity between him and the excluded, which includes

⁸⁹ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 75.

⁹⁰ M. E. Boring, *The Gospel of Matthew: Introductions, Commentary, and Reflections* (NIB 8, Nashville 1995) 174.

all those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, and imprisoned. By identifying himself with these least of the brethren, Jesus makes charity indeed as constitutive of a relationship with God. Thus, this positive ethical regard to the wounded neighbour becomes an ethical imperative of the way of Jesus ⁹¹. In the context of today, Matthew's theological perspective of presenting Jesus as a healing messiah indeed gives hope to the suffering humanity. It also encourages one to show due honour to the physician, whose ability to heal comes from God (Sir 38:1); and to believe in God, who created medicines out of the earth (Sir 38:4) and has granted human beings' knowledge of these natural means of curing human ills. The druggist prepares the medicines, and the physician administers them. Both the patient and the physician are to pray to God for healing, but it is through the efficacy of these natural medicines that healing will take place, and God will give to the medical doctors the insights for effecting cures and restoring the ill to health (38:12-14).⁹² In this way, the healing ministry of Jesus is continuous. It is the manifestation of the healing Messiah.

6. CONCLUSION

The exegetical and theological study of Matthew 4:23-25 indeed presents Jesus as the Healing Messiah. From

⁹¹ J. P. Kakkanattu, "Pre-Text-Text-Context of the Parable of Good Samaritan: A Hermeneutical Key to Read *Fratelli Tutti*," *Fratelli Tutti: Perspectives: With a Message from Pope Francis* (ed. K. Kachappilly) (Delhi, 2021) 13-29, here 16.

⁹² H. C. Kee, "Medicine and Healing," *ABD* 4:664.

this study, we can put forward the relevance and the novelties of this paper. First, the article is delimited to Mt 4:23-25 as it is a Matthean first condensed summary before he reports any details of Jesus' teaching and healing activity; and that this pericope begins with the Matthean catchword "Galilee" (Γαλιλαία) in verse 23 and ends with the same catchword in verse 25, and in this pericope, there are two occurrences of word θεραπεύω (23, 24), as well this pericope hangs on the central theme of our study "healing" in verse 24. Second, this pericope (Mt 4:23-25) belongs to the literary form of summary statements. The summary statements by way of the Matthean redaction fulfil literary techniques that unite the narrative. Third, Matthew's uses of θεραπεύω indicate that healing is one of the three major aspects of the ministry of Jesus to Israel, along with teaching and preaching. He redacts Markan material to depict Jesus primarily as a healer. Fourth, Matthew has distributed his healing summaries and comments throughout the Gospel, and in every summary, Jesus heals all the sick or every disease. In this way, Jesus fulfils the prophecies. Sixth, the evidence of the kingdom's presence is the healing of the sick. Seventh, Through the threefold ministry of Jesus, Matthew emphasizes that Jesus is a teacher at the same time, a healer. Eighth, in this pericope, the people are healed without meeting any requirements or confessing to faith. It is entirely the initiative and grace of the messianic representative of God's kingdom. Ninth, it encourages one to show due honour to the physician, whose ability to heal comes from God (Sir 38:1). Tenth, Matthew's theological perspective of presenting Jesus as a healing messiah gives hope to the suffering humanity.