Healing as a First-Fruit

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In Paul's letter to the Romans, he uses a farming metaphor to describe the manner in which the Kingdom comes:

"For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved." (Romans 8:22-24)

When he says "but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly", we should understand that the "first-fruits" refers to the farmer's earliest crop of the year. The earliest crop would be an indicator of the quality of the harvest when the fullness came in.

In a similar vein, in Ephesians the Holy Spirit is referred to as the down-payment of a future inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14). What we learn from all of this is that we as believers are already getting a foretaste of the coming Kingdom, and it whets our appetite for the fullness that is still to come!

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So what does this inheritance look like for us at present? Well, the author of Hebrews gives us some insight into this. He speaks about believers as those "who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come" (Hebrews 6:4).

Now while all of these phrases are nuggets just itching to be expounded upon, I'd like to home in on the last phrase: "powers of the age to come". What this phrase is hinting at is that when we exercise the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we are participating in "future blessings". The blessings of the future Kingdom beginning to filter into our present reality.

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This sheds some light on the purpose of the gift of healing. Healing is one of the 'first-fruits' of our inheritance in the coming Kingdom. Healing demonstrates what heaven will be like when all the effects of sin have been removed.

At Christ's return, our bodies will be "raised in power" (1 Corinthians 15:43) and we will experience the "redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:23). So healing is a "foretaste" of the redemption that our bodies (and all of creation!) will one day experience in the Kingdom of Jesus.

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For the unbeliever, healing is not a "first-fruit" of their future inheritance; it is a 'sign' that the Kingdom we are proclaiming is real. In Hebrews it says, "This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." (Hebrews 2:3,4)

So healing is a sign and an assurance that this promise of the Gospel can be trusted; it's a "sign of things to come". Our salvation comes with the promise that when the King returns, all the suffering, sickness, sin and sinners will be banished from the Kingdom. Jesus said, "Behold, I make all things new".

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When we understand that healing is a first-fruit of the coming Kingdom, it gives us a correct perspective. It serves both as a warning and an encouragement. It is a warning to guard against expecting to enjoy our whole inheritance in this life, which will only set us up for disappointment. But it is also an encouragement that we can experience healing in this life, even before Jesus returns!

People who do not properly understand the Kingdom in this way, either:
1. have a very low expectation for healing and are basically just waiting for heaven, or
2. are constantly being disappointed when they don't experience their whole inheritance now.

Understanding that healing is a first-fruit enables us to receive it with gratitude and an eager anticipation of the inheritance that is still to come.