

“Prayer, Healing and the Kingdom of God”

James 5

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(Prayer, Healing)

(For a fuller and different treatment of the James 5 text on “healing” see “Expectant and Accepting” and “Prayer – Pro-Active Patience” in James sermons on www.soundliving.org)

James 5:15 “And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up.

Will God heal every time if we pray in dependence on him?

To answer that question I want to put this issue of healing in the context of the Kingdom of God.

In the OT God is presented at the supreme King of the universe, ruling over all.

But from the moment of Adam’s sin, it became apparent that something broke – mankind now largely rebelled against the King’s rule.

Not only was humanity broken from that day forward but all creation was affected.

Human beings and the world in which we live have been so altered by sin that we barely reflect the glory of God or the glory with which we were first created.

We don’t live any longer in a Garden of Eden.

The Bible starts, in Genesis, with the tree of life in a setting of intimacy between God and mankind.

The Bible ends, in Revelation, with the tree of life in a setting of restored intimacy between God and mankind.

Between Genesis and Revelation, the message of the Bible is humanity’s on-going rebellion and God’s greater grace to restore his creation.

Starting in Genesis 3:15, God promised a reversal of the effects of sin.

In Genesis 12 Abraham was promised that through his offspring the whole world would be blessed by God.

The Prophets saw how broken the world was and looked forward to the day when sin's domination would be ended and God's righteous and benevolent rule would again reign supreme.

The Prophets likewise wrote that this life-changing and world-changing rule of God, the Kingdom of God, would be ushered in by his appointed Messiah.

Then with the NT, we see Jesus presenting himself as that "Messiah." He came proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God – the rule of God overcoming the forces of evil which have held sway over humanity and the rest of creation for millennia.

He came teaching us to pray: "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

The kingdom of darkness in the world is characterized by sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like, and it ends in death!

God's reign in the world is characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control and it is life!

Jesus came ushering in the Kingdom of God **but not all at once**.

He announced what would be in the future AND how some of that future would be experienced now.

It is as if the future has invaded the present.

Paul wrote that our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

We are colonists not from some place of the past but from the Kingdom of the future.

We, who are saved by God's grace through faith in Christ, are tethered to the future but living in the present.

We are future "kingdom of God" people living in the present kingdom of this world.

Now because of that there are at least two things that are true.

1. We have an almost unimaginable future (1 Corinthians 2:9) that is secured by God's grace:

Revelation 21:1-4

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away...”

What we often refer to as “heaven” is actually the new earth that God will recreate (2 Peter 3:7,13).

And on that new earth we know, from God's promises, it will be a radically different experience for us than now.

- There will be peace with God – no fear of alienation.
- Our relationships will be whole and healthy because the fruit of the Spirit will not be sporadic in us but consistent.
- The heartaches we know now will then be impossible.
- In Romans 8 the implication is that even the physical earth and universe will be restored to greater glory.
- And, more to the point about healing, our bodies will be resurrected, immortal and incorruptible.

2. The second thing that is true is that some of that future blessing of the kingdom of God, God's complete and uncontested rule, is experienced even now.

When the Kingdom of God is completely fulfilled on the new earth, at Christ's return, we will experience **a perfect peace with God** untroubled by circumstance and doubt.

The amazing truth is that that future complete peace even now invades the present so that we may know a great measure of that peace with God.

We call it a growing trust and intimacy with God.

It is also true that when the Kingdom of God is completely fulfilled on the new earth, we will experience **a perfect peace with each other**.

And the amazing truth is that that perfect peace with each other even now invades the present so that we know a measure of that peace through forgiveness, reconciliation, kindness, and genuine fellowship.

We call it a growing fellowship of believers.

I give you those two illustrations of how the future and present are connected in order to help you see the same regarding physical healing.

The Bible teaches that when Jesus comes again our mortal bodies will be resurrected immortal and incorruptible.

We believe that physical health and wholeness will be ours in the resurrection of the body. 1 Corinthians 15

When Jesus was here healing people he was demonstrating the power of the Kingdom of God **that will eventually overcome all** the devastating effects of sin – including disease, debilitation and death.

Likewise today when God heals people he is giving us a taste of what is to come.

That healing may be by the immediate intervention of God, what we call a miracle, or the mediated intervention of God through medicine.

But in either form it is, in part, the future wholeness, invading the present.

What we are experiencing now in this life, by God's grace, is what some call the "already but not yet" of the Kingdom of God.

Perfection of our hearts, our relationships and our bodies waits for the coming of Jesus and the resurrection, but we are not there yet!

But already we are experiencing partial blessing of the Kingdom that is yet to come.

- I expect that God will work his grace in me to make me more like Jesus but I accept ,because of my sin nature and a sin-sick world, that it will not be complete until the return of Christ.
- I expect that God will work his grace in us all to make us love one another but I accept that it will not be complete until Jesus comes again.
- And I expect that God will often, even usually, heal our bodies but I accept that it will not be complete until the resurrection.

I don't wonder why God doesn't heal us every time we are sick anymore than I wonder why he doesn't make us all instantly sinless or instantly harmonious in our relationships with each other.

But what I learn from James and the rest of the Bible is that while I must accept the limitations of life before the resurrection, **I can expect God's Kingdom blessings in part even now.**

And so we pray; we pray expectantly and acceptingly at the same time.

But our faith is not in faith, it is not in a particular answer, and it is not faith in the kind of prayer we pray; our faith is in God to do his perfect benevolent will.

So, do we pray for physical healing? Yes!

God has demonstrated in Scripture and in more recent church history that he often chooses to heal, sometimes directly through what we call a miracle and more usually, as I already said, indirectly through other means such as medical intervention. We know "every good and perfect gift is from above."

Just as we expect him to help us grow spiritually so we can expect him to provide for our physical needs.

When I pray "give us this day our daily bread," I mean it and I expect God to provide!

And at the same time, I ought not to be shocked if in his greater wisdom and benevolence he chooses not to.

My faith is in him not in my circumstances.

We live **expecting** that we will already experience some of the blessings of the Kingdom that is yet to come.

And we **pray** because we know prayer is a means that God ordained whereby he would act on our behalf whether for spiritual or physical blessing.

And we live **accepting** his will because we trust him!

Expectant and Accepting!