

## **“EXPECTANT AND ACCEPTING”**

(The ministry of healing)

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How do we respond when friends of ours are very sick? What do we do when loved ones are facing life-threatening diseases? Nothing seems to touch us quicker or deeper than physical suffering -either our own or that of a loved one. Nothing seems to draw us to the essential issues of life faster than a serious illness or accident. But in the midst of such a crisis, how do we minister to one another. When someone is sick, is there anything we can really do?

James 5:14-16 *“Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”*

Is that true? Is that passage of the Bible for today? When we look to the Gospels we see Jesus healing the sick. *“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people”* (Mt 4:23)

### **Healing, Then and Now**

When Jesus heard the appeal of the Centurion in Matthew 8 He said, *“I will go and heal your servant.”* When Jesus landed on the other side of the lake, *“he saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.”* (Matthew 14). He healed a hemorrhaging woman, a man with fever and dysentery, a man with a shriveled hand, men and women born blind. the crippled, the mute, and the paralyzed, - He healed them all.

When Jesus introduced Himself in the synagogue at Galilee he quoted from the prophet Isaiah and declared that this was his ministry: *‘The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’* Luke 4:18-19

Can there be any doubt that Jesus desired to heal people of their diseases? One of his ministries was clearly a ministry of healing. Wherever he went he preached the good news of the kingdom and healed the sick.

On one visit to India I saw that kind of ministry taking place. As an Indian Pastor would move into a new village to establish a church he would go in first praying for the sick and teaching the Bible wherever there was a home willing to hear him. One Sunday morning under a large thatched-roof canopy I heard several testimonies of men and

women telling of the physical healings that had taken place in their village as the gospel was brought to them. I thought I was in the times of the Acts of the Apostles for you see, not only did Jesus himself heal but also in Luke 9: we read, *“When Jesus called the twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom, of God and to heal the sick... So they went out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.”*

And then in Acts 4 after Jesus went back to the Father, it says that the believers in Jerusalem prayed: *“Now Lord, consider the threats the rulers make against us and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”* And in answer to that prayer, it says in verse 12 *“that many miraculous signs and wonders were performed among the people and crowds gathered and the sick were brought out to be healed.”*

Both through Jesus when He was here physically and through the church after Jesus left - God chose to heal people of their sicknesses and infirmities. Down through the centuries there have been healings too numerous to count. All the great men and women of God in history have witnessed the healing power of God: Calvin, Luther, Whitefield, Wesley, and Spurgeon.

At 14 years of age Barbara Commiskey was as able bodied as any other girl in her gym class - she liked the rings and could grasp them as well as anyone. At 15 her hand began to get a will of its own. And in her Bible Quizzing competition she could still jump faster than anyone else but would nearly every time fall to the floor -unable to control her body. She began stumbling down stairs. Her vision blurred. Her left hand clenched into an involuntary fist. By 19 it was certain - Barbara had Multiple Sclerosis (MS). For the next four years Barbara went through cycles of being bedridden to being able to walk without a cane. But by 27 her diaphragm was paralyzing, breathing was more of a problem, she developed a chronic lung disease, and she had constant pneumonia and asthma. One lung collapsed and the other labored at half of its potential. Next came an ileostomy and catheter. That was followed by a tracheotomy to allow her to breath. Three times she went into cardiac arrest. Her vision got so bad that she was technically blind. Tumors developed on her hands and feet. Her body twisted in on itself. At 31 she was moved to a hospice to die.

Barbara was a Christian but by now all she could do was pray - and pray she did. She spoke out loud, unselfconsciously to God. On June 7, 1981 just after receiving over 450 cards of encouragement and promises of prayer, Barbara believes she heard a voice tell her to get out of bed and walk. Two friends were there and Barbara told them to get her family because she was going to walk. The friends were confused because Barbara had not walked for over two years. Barbara got out of bed and where before there were legs that had atrophied, now there were muscles and firmness.

Barbara's mother's first words upon seeing her were, "Calves, You have calves"! Barbara's father couldn't speak but simply grabbed his daughter and began to dance around the living room. A friend who is an occupational therapist was there and she said to Barbara, "you just wrecked everything I learned in school."

MS is incurable but today spinal taps reveal no trace of it in her body. Her caved in lung, dormant for years, is healthy. The tumors are gone. The bowel began to function again. Health was entirely restored, instantly. Today, Barbara is training to be a surgeon's assistant.

Such illustrations of healing happen in our country and around the world. There are people in our own church who could stand and give testimony of God's healing in their lives.

Again I read from James 5: *"Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up."*

Dare we believe that?

Do we dare to expect God to heal in our day?

Do we dare to expect Him to heal our loved ones or us?

### **Afraid Healing won't "work"**

A couple of years ago a woman of our church called and asked if I would come and pray for her healing. Cancer had racked her body. The treatments were done, nothing but a miracle could change the course of her life. I and two other elders went to her home where she had been sent to die. As we drove there some questions plagued me: What if she isn't healed? Won't the disappointment be too hard to handle? Maybe she will assume her faith, or ours, isn't strong enough? Maybe she or her family members will now question God? Is it worth the risk? The closer I got to that home the more skeptical I became about what could happen as a result of our prayers. Oh, I said I believed that God could heal if He wanted to but I didn't expect Him to. I wanted Him to but didn't expect He would.

I had more confidence that a spontaneous remission might take place, or that some new medicine might yet be discovered than expect that God might heal her. And I know that most evangelicals are precisely that way. Our theology says God can heal, but our practice says He hardly ever does.

1. We say to ourselves that God didn't heal everyone in the Bible - and we are right - he didn't.
2. We say, sometimes God may not choose to heal because of a higher purpose that we don't understand - that too is right.
3. We say we don't want to give people false expectations lest it harm their faith in God - and we don't want to give people wrong information.

BUT the text we have read from James is so clear and so simple. The overwhelming evidence of the Bible makes it obvious that God does heal and not just infrequently. The teaching of the Bible and the experience of the people of the Bible seem very different from our experience - They expected healing and we expect that God won't.

### **What's the problem?**

What has brought us to such a sorry state of skepticism? A couple of things come to my mind as the reason: In 2 Chronicles 16:12 there is a description of a man who we are very much like in our day. It says, "*In the 39th year of his reign Asa was afflicted with a disease in his feet. Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the Lord, but only from the physicians... and he died*". This is not an argument against physicians - in fact in the Bible we find God using physicians as one means to bring healing. And I'm not going to argue that if Asa had sought the Lord he necessarily would have been healed - the text doesn't tell us that. My point in showing you that text is that Asa like us had more confidence in the doctors than he did in the Lord. In the last couple of centuries there has been much more information about our world and our bodies than ever before. As the amount of information grew we became less dependent upon God. The more we understood about the "natural" process of healing the less we saw God involved. People formerly had to pray that God would cure infections - now they just take penicillin.

We have seen new medical discoveries such as vaccines, antibiotics, and medical procedures, and have a growing understanding of the cause and effect of clean water, sterilization of surgical instruments, and vitamins. But instead of praising God for these means that he uses to heal us, many of us believe that God is not really necessary for these things. God may have been important in healing in a pre-scientific time but not now. And he may still be necessary for the spiritual but not the physical.

### **Functional Deists**

And in our new rationalism we have become "functional deists". A deist believes that God made the world but, after setting it in motion, he withdrew to let it run on its own. Like a clockmaker, he wound it up and when it winds down he will step in again. But until then we are on our own. As "functional deists" we don't expect God to do anything about the here and now. We can explain nearly everything by natural cause-and-effect relationships and because we can, we assume that God isn't in it. If the doctor removes the burst appendix and antibiotics clear up the infection then we say God had nothing to do with that.

But that is unbiblical thinking. My Bible says in Hebrews 1:3 that the Lord Jesus is "*sustaining all things by His powerful word*. It also says the same in Colossians 1:17 "*in Him all things hold together*"

God is involved in the "normal" or 'regular affairs of life. He is actively involved in our everyday lives in every detail – "sustaining all things." Penicillin, antibiotics, and

sanitation, etc. are all part of God's involvement in our world. He is as much involved in the things that we would call normal as He is in the miraculous.

I remember on one occasion riding with someone in downtown Denver. We needed to park in a busy section of town and this person prayed that God would prepare a place for us to park. And then when one opened up just as we arrived, the other person said, "Thank you Jesus." Now that really sounded silly to me. I thought, surely God isn't involved in such little details as whether we find a parking place or not. Finding a parking place is a matter of knowing where to look or being better prepared to pay for parking. Now surely I was right in not wanting people to presume upon God - to expect God to get them out of the messes they get themselves into by their poor planning or ineptness. But what I had become was a "functional deist" - assuming God would not be involved in such mundane issues of life.

What the Bible teaches instead is that God is aware of a single sparrow that falls from the sky and thus surely He cares for us. He is as involved in our lives as in that of a sparrow. In my former rationalistic ("functional deist") thinking, I had pushed God out to the edges of life. Assuming that He was involved only in the spiritual issues or in those very infrequent miracles of life-which I didn't really expect to ever see.

Why should I find it so difficult to believe that the God who ordered the affairs of people and nations to bring everything together at just the right time to bring Jesus into this world would not order the affairs of men and women to have one of them leaving a parking place at just the time I need it, if He so chooses. He is my Father and he is involved in every detail of my life.

We don't expect God to heal today because we have pushed God out of most of our life - relegating him to only the spiritual and to the future. Because we have failed to see God in our everyday lives in the everyday things of life, because we have failed to see him as responsible for the normal healings of life through medicine, and through the body's God-designed ability to heal, we don't see God in any of it and we have no expectations of him.

We have created a dichotomy in life between the natural or physical and the spiritual and have assumed that God has nothing to do with the natural order of things. And when we meet up with a physical crisis we can't fix, we see such a large gulf between where we are and where we think God is involved that we don't dare to believe that He will work in this situation. That is just one reason why I believe we are so skeptical about God actually healing people today.

### **Self-Centered**

But there is another reason: The second reason why we are so skeptical about God possibly healing people today is that we are so self-centered. Put very bluntly it is that we assume that if we don't get what we want when we ask God for something then it must mean that God failed or at least that we failed in our asking.

But is it not also entirely possible that God doesn't see it the same way we do? Can we not trust Him enough to take "no" for an answer, and still believe that He loves us and that He is working all things out in exactly the right way to further His Kingdom. And there will come a day when we will see that what happened was just exactly right and we will say "God I agree with what you did - it was perfect." And "I praise you for the results.

Assuming that we know best what we need, we ask God to heal and then when he doesn't - we assume it isn't working. And after seeing that happen too many times we quit asking. But our discouragement and resulting skepticism were not because God failed to act but because we presumed to know how He should act. Our skepticism was not God's fault but our self-centeredness.

But let's be done with such self-centeredness. I believe our God is sovereign. Are we not the same ones who stand and declare with the Lord's prayer: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Are we not the ones who repeat, "Seek first the Kingdom of God"? Can we not then safely assume that our God is working all things out just as he has planned from the beginning of the world? Can we not trust Him to further His kingdom even through our sickness if He so chooses, and know that ultimately even we shall say, "Your way was perfect God."

And let's also be done with "functional deism." Our Father God is a God who is involved in every detail of our lives here and now. He is intimately acquainted with every need from a parking place to a diseased kidney. And it is right that we do just as it says in James 5; we pray. One of the great tragedies of our rationalistic age is that even in the church we have ceased to believe that God will act on behalf of his people. We have not because we ask not"

### **Expectant and Accepting**

"Pastor, are you suggesting that we take that James passage literally?"

"Yes I am!

"Are you suggesting then that we ought to expect to be healed when we pray for healing?"

"Yes I am!

"But Pastor, if healing doesn't come, (and it doesn't always come) what then are we to assume? Aren't we fools for expecting something that may not happen?"

"No we aren't fools for expecting God to act on our behalf! He has proven His love. He will act on our behalf! It may not be what I chose but he does act. That is why I want to be an expectant Christian. I don't want to live in skepticism but in anticipation.

"And what if His response to my prayer for healing is not the response I would have chosen?"

"That I can accept! Because I know He loves me. It is not foolish to expect God to act on our behalf, but it is foolish to presume to know what that is. I want to

pray expectantly and acceptingly. I will pray for healing and expect healing and also be able to accept what my Father gives in its place if he so chooses. My responsibility is to pray, God's responsibility is to respond. If he chooses not to heal then He's responsible for that.

"But Pastor, if people pray expectantly for healing and it never comes won't that destroy their faith?"

"They will surely be disappointed, sorely disappointed, but that does not necessitate a loss of faith. Did not Paul plead with God expectantly three times to remove his infirmity because Paul was disappointed with no" for an answer? But Paul came to accept that answer and to understand it as the very best for Him.

### **A New Approach**

I believe we have been afraid of the subject of healing for too long. It is often God's desire to heal his people - that is proven many times a year in our lives. We all have sicknesses, some less serious than others, but in each case it could be life-threatening if one of three things didn't happen:

1. If God didn't heal us through the means of the body's own ability to fight off sickness.
2. If God didn't heal us through the means of medicines or medical procedures.
3. If God didn't heal us supernaturally (a miracle of healing).

But in all cases God is involved in healing us. It is God's desire usually to heal.

Therefore from now on we are going to do what it says in James 5. The Elders of the Church will meet and those of you who so desire may call on them to anoint you with oil in the name of the Lord and pray for you for healing. Your need may be for physical healing, emotional healing or even spiritual healing. We come expecting the Lord Jesus to heal. And if He chooses to heal - we will praise Him. And if as in King David's son's case, he chooses not to heal, we will do as David did, we will rise up from our prayer and praise God.

What a tragedy if our self-centeredness or our rationalism would keep us from seizing an opportunity to pray expectantly for those in need. Even after we pray there may be no physical evidences of healing, but that is not our responsibility. We must ask and keep asking until the person is healed, until God says "no" or until it doesn't matter anymore.

Oh God help us to be expectant people and accepting people!

James 5:14—16

*Is anyone of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*