

Heal the Sick

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[0 : 00] As we sit, let's bow our heads and pray together. Our gracious Father, we thank you for your word. And we thank you, Lord, that you taught us that your word is truth and that your truth can set people like us free.

And Father, we pray for that freedom as we hear your word and discern your truth. And Father, we pray that prayer in the hope that we might become free to be the people that you call us to be in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In Luke chapter 5, we read these words, The power of the Lord was present for Jesus to heal the sick.

In 2012, you will recall that the Olympics took place in London. And before the Olympics, there was quite a lot of haroush about how do you get tickets and what do you do.

And my PA at the time was very keen to go to the Olympics. And somebody had told her, apply for loads and loads of tickets because the more you apply for, the more likely you are to get awarded some.

[1 : 29] She also claimed that somebody told her that if you get awarded a lot, you don't have to pay for them. So she put in her application and amazingly, she got 1,800 pounds worth of tickets.

And then she discovered that actually she did have to pay for them. And even more amazing, well, she'd rather hope that she might get, you know, the 100 meters final or one of the cycling races or something.

She got, in fact, five days of synchronized swimming. Now, I am not here in any way to mock synchronized swimming.

It looks to me strange, but it also looks to me to be really skillful. And I can understand why it is an Olympic sport.

The problem with it is, as far as I can best tell, I have never met anybody outside of the Olympics who's told me they're off today to go and watch synchronized swimming.

[2 : 38] I've never known that. So I imagine that what there is, there is a small number of people who are very excited about synchronized swimming.

Then there are the rest of us who aren't quite sure what to make of it. And there are some, and I've heard comedians stand up and mock it. Today, we're going to be talking about the church's ministry of healing.

Having been a minister for 50 years, more, I've discovered that there are some people who are very excited about the healing ministry.

Sometimes, I wonder if they're a bit overexcited, but I'll come back to that. Then there is the rest of us who might be persuaded, but we're not sure.

We've all heard stories about prayers we prayed, and the person who we prayed for didn't get healed. So we're not quite sure. Is this just unreasonably lifting people's expectations?

[3 : 47] And then there are some, call themselves cessationists, who believe that all the gifts of the Spirit mentioned in Romans chapter 12 and 1 Corinthians chapter 12 ceased the moment the last apostle of Jesus died.

It seems to me that is wrong and severe, and if you are a cessationist, I do apologize to you, but my reading of Scripture would lead me to believe I can't agree with that position.

In 1984, a man called John Wimber arrived on these shores. His presence heralded quite a lot of publicity, most of it good, and his big message was that alongside the preaching of God's Word, God wishes to do signs and wonders.

And John Wimber, I think, had a remarkable ministry. I had the privilege of going to his church in Anaheim in Los Angeles on Easter Sunday when a crowd of 5,000 people gathered in a warehouse

to listen to the Easter message and to receive healing, if that's what they wanted.

Well, I'm here to tell you this morning that I think the healing ministry is an integral part of the life of the church. And I want to give you four reasons now why I think it's so important.

[5 : 30] The first thing is, Jesus did miracles. Jesus prayed for healing. And he encouraged his disciples to do the same.

Some of you may have read that amazing verse in John chapter 14, verse 12, I think it is, where Jesus says this. He said, I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing.

Imagine that. Will do what I have been doing. And then John goes on. He says this, he will do even greater things than these because I'm going to the Father.

In other words, what Jesus is saying here is that when he goes to the Father, he's leaving behind a new community of people, you and me, who are supposed to continue his work here on earth.

That work, quite clearly, as we observe in the New Testament, involves the ministry of healing. It's important because Jesus healed and encouraged his disciples to play their part.

[6 : 39] Two, we need to have a bigger understanding of salvation. The word in the New Testament, I mean, I don't know what you think when you think of the word salvation.

I've heard people say, oh, God has saved me from myself and there's a measure of truth in that. I've heard many of you say, God has saved me from the consequences of my sin and there's nothing wrong with that.

But in the New Testament, the concept of salvation is better understood on a much broader plane than simply the forgiveness of sins, though in my case, that would be enough.

No, it's about wholeness. It's about the integration of body, mind, soul, and spirit. And salvation embraces all those ideas, which clearly must take into account body, as well as mind, soul, and spirit.

So the ministry of healing is important because it is part of what salvation is meant to deliver. In Romans, in chapter 6, and verse 23 onwards, we read these words.

[8 : 03] He said, now you have been set free from sin, have become slaves to God. The benefit you reap leads to holiness, wholeness, holiness, and the result is eternal life.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord. A right standing of salvation is an understanding of God's concern to free us in every area of our lives, body, mind, soul, and spirit.

Salvation carries with it this profound idea of wholeness. And wholeness can also be described as holiness.

First Thessalonians, Paul tells us that we're called to holiness. The third thing is, healing is a sign of the coming kingdom.

In Luke chapter 4, we read these words. In verses 18 to 21. Sorry about this.

[9 : 29] My eyesight can't pick the numbers of the verses. Jesus talks about, in Mark chapter 4, verse 21, the idea that the coming kingdom is about bringing this wholeness to each of us.

I'll come back to that in just a moment. And the fourth thing is, healing is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

What I want to teach you today is that we all, if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, we all have a part to play in the healing ministry.

Within that, there are some people who are particularly gifted with gifts of healing. healing. It's what we're told in 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

In that great list of gifts that Paul says are spiritual gifts, we are all called to play our part in the healing ministry. Second thing I want to teach you about this morning is that I think if we're going to understand healing ministry in our churches, we need to understand the role of faith in the ministry of healing.

You can find several occasions in the New Testament where Jesus commends people for their faith. Remember, there was a woman in Mark chapter 5 and verse 34 who touched, she'd had a serious gynecological problem for years and she touched the hem of Jesus and was healed.

[11 : 16] And there's no apparent statement of faith from her or anything like that. She just touched his robe and she was healed. And Jesus says to her, mysteriously, your faith has made you well.

There are plenty of occasions where it says that Jesus healed people because of their faith, but there are occasions too when Jesus told people that they were healed even though they expressed no faith.

The healing of the gathering swine which you read about in Mark chapter 5. Remember where Jesus meets this man severely tormented by evil spirits. And Jesus takes the evil spirits and casts them into a herd of pigs which run into the water and drown. There's never no sign whatsoever that the man who was disturbed had any faith. In fact, the only people who recognized Jesus in that story were the evil spirits that dwelt within him. Faith is mysterious.

[12:27] And what I mean by that is it would be great, wouldn't it, if we could write some mathematical formula. So me plus my faith equals miracle.

Sadly, we're mostly too grown up to know that that's not true. It doesn't mean that people like me and people like you wouldn't benefit if we had more faith.

Of course not. On the other hand, Jesus did say, didn't he, and this is mystery as well, is that if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can go and say to that mountain, go throw yourself into the sea and it will be done.

The thing about a mustard seed is, I'm told it's a very, very tiny seed. You have faith the size of a mustard seed. I don't think Jesus intended that we would make cosmetic changes to the universe. But what he is saying is, faith is important and you may not need a lot of it in order to see me do amazing work.

[13:39] The mystery of faith bears down upon us because I am aware in my own life and I would guess in the lives of many of you, you have prayed for somebody and nothing has happened.

Some of you might even describe the fact that you've hammered on the doors of heaven for somebody you loved who was very ill or for yourself, whatever. And nothing happened.

The psalmist confronted this in the Psalms. They don't translate it like this in the English versions of the Bible. But at one point the psalmist is basically saying where are you God?

Are you in the loo? Because the silence was deafening. And you know what that silence is like.

And so your temptation is to give up. To stand back from the ministry of healing and hope that there may be others specially gifted who will do it.

[14:50] But as far as you're concerned you're not really bothered about it anymore. Or even worse you develop a terrible negativity towards God.

I well remember going to speak in Dowie Abbey which is a Roman Catholic abbey in Berkshire. And they asked me to speak on forgiveness for six weeks. And my last session was about our need to forgive God.

Because I'm aware that there are people maybe here this morning who are angry with God because they prayed and they felt that God let them down.

That's a very understandable response but at some point friend you're going to have to let go of that. It's not going to do you good just to blame God and have a negative attitude towards Him.

[15:56] In this abbey I started to talk about forgiving God it's full of packed with Roman Catholics come to this Lent course and suddenly I was aware that in the congregation I could hear sobs and then there were more sobs and then more sobs and suddenly an awful lot of people in there were weeping.

faced with the reality that they knew they had to forgive God. Well it's a Roman Catholic abbey so there's no prayer ministry at the end or anything like that.

We all went home I had no idea what happened after that. But if you're one of them maybe you need to sob and maybe you need to seek God's forgiveness.

The last thing I want to say to you is this I've said that the ministry of healing is for all of us I want to ask the question so what is your part? We all have a part to play.

Well the first thing is I would love you to develop the habit you can do it on a piece of paper or somebody said to me they got a little black book I didn't quite like the sound of that.

[17:19] But they got a little black book where they put in the names of people who they knew who were in need of healing. And they wrote down the names of people and every day in the presence of God they just read.

I know some of you do that already. You can even do it on your smartphone in the notes section. Just put down people's names. And every day if you can't find 90 seconds or two minutes I would have to question how deep your discipleship goes.

and just bring people to God. The second thing is this is really important. See we're all part of the healing ministry and God's great idea was that the church, you and me, gathered here today,

Christians all over the world, that the church, the new community of believers, churches, would be a place which would in itself be a kind of healing community.

And I'd like to say to you, you know, my experience is that all churches are wonderfully whole and healing communities. But unfortunately having been a bishop and having had experience of lots and lots of different churches, I'm ashamed to say that some of the churches I was aware of were just plain toxic.

I can't imagine anybody would get healed in there. People who are daggers drawn with each other, people who really dislike each other. I arrived at one church one night to do a confirmation and the church wardens were standing either side of the door.

[19 : 06] They said to me, can we have a word? Always worrying, believe me, when you're a bishop. I said, yeah, of course. They said, how can we get rid of our vicar?

So I thought they were joking. I said, well, you could shoot him. Fortunately, they realised that I was joking.

What I said to them was, how do you think God is ever going to bless this church? Have you spoken to your vicar about what you're anxious? No, we haven't. I said, well, I think the vicar is your first port of call.

See, churches that harbour that kind of behaviour are not going to be blessed by God. You noticed in our amazing reading today about these people bringing their friends to Jesus, that the text I chose is the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.

You know what I think? I think if our church communities were really genuinely healing communities, those who have the specific spiritual gift of healing might see God do a lot more stuff amongst us.

[20 : 24] What does that mean? In James 5, there's a verse I love, although I find it very, very challenging. I know it in the authorised version of the Bible best.

It says, the fervent effectual prayer of the righteous man availeth much. And at the beginning of James chapter 5, James talks about relationships in the body of Christ.

Before he gets round to saying, is any of you sick? Call round the elders of the church. Before he does any of that stuff, he tells them that they need to watch their behaviour.

And I think that's absolutely spot on. And we need to watch our behaviour in the body of Christ. We need to be people who behave appropriately towards each other.

In Mark chapter 11, we read there a very important scripture. You know, Jesus says, we've got faith the size of a mustard seed. Go throw, tell the mountain to go throw itself into the sea.

[21 : 37] It will be done. And then he says, when you stand praying, believe what you are praying for and see what happens. And then he says, this is the sting in the tail, friend.

If you have anything against anybody, go seek their forgiveness. You know what the most terrible responsibility of being a disciple of Jesus Christ is?

That if I've done something wrong to somebody, clearly I need to go and seek their forgiveness, but the Bible turns out on its head as well and says if somebody, somebody's done something to you and you've done something to somebody, it's always your responsibility to go and put it right.

And dare we claim the promise of James chapter five, the fervent effectual prayer of the righteous person availeth much.

You look at the world, friend, and I'm pretty sure you think to yourself something needs to change here right now. You look at the world and you think that and you read your newspaper and it's raining outside again and you start to feel bad about life, who wouldn't?

[23 : 07] But you have a part to play in becoming a meaning maker, not just in the lives of individuals, but in communities. when one person changes, their immediate environment changes for Christ.

When one person, when a community changes, there's a possibility that a town or a region can change. And when a region changes, even a country can change.

And when a country changes, the global geopolitical mess that we find ourselves in can also change.

But in the end, it's about you and about your faith and your understanding of the mystery of faith and your desire to be persistent in prayer, not to be put off.

I've often thought this, you know, it's like people pray and nothing happens and they blame God.

Often doctors fail us. You know, they diagnose it wrong or they give us the wrong treatment or they

don't know what's to do.

[24 : 28] We don't write off doctors altogether on that basis, do we? But many of you are too quick to write off God if he doesn't do what you want. now is the time.

Now is the time. If you're a disciple of Jesus Christ to step up, now is the time.

If you're wavering around the edge of the church thinking, you know, these are nice welcoming people but I don't know about the stuff they bang on about, maybe now is the time.

The effective fervent prayer of a righteous person. We don't have to earn our righteousness in the church. We have to trust what Jesus did on the cross of Calvary. Bearing shame and scoffing root, in my place condemned he stood.

Seal my pardon with his blood. Imagine. Hallelujah. What a savior. savior. So I want to give you a little challenge.

[25 : 37] I'm expecting tomorrow there will be a run on little black books in the stationery shops of this town. As you do what I think the Lord would have you do.

For those of you who think, and let me just say because you think it doesn't mean you might have it because unfortunately we human beings can suffer from something called delusion.

But if you sense you have a gift of healing, then what you need to do I think is to go and test that with people who love you enough to tell you the truth. And also mention it to the minister of your church, Clive or Russ.

And let them help you discover whether that's where your gift is. And if you believe that a church should be a healing community, it should be a greenhouse where in growing together others who come amongst us will also find that growth and wholeness of which the scripture speaks.

We want to say no to toxic churches. We want to say no to bad relationships in the body. Maybe some you need to pick up a telephone, write a note, whatever.

[27 : 04] But don't be the person who undermines the wholeness of the church. When we understand that, I think we understand that verse which I read out for my text.

It's an interesting verse to me. Where Luke says this, he says, the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.

You want to be in a church where the power of God is present to heal the sick? There's a work to be done. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. As was John Wesley's habit, just a few moments of silence for the Holy Spirit to come and bring you under conviction as to what you need to do.

our gracious God, we want to call down holy fire upon your church.

[28 : 39] The fire of the Spirit, Lord, would you please forgive us for our lukewarmness, for the sense of distance we put between what is and what we might contribute.

Father, forgive us for bearing grudges against you, against members of the congregation, whoever, whatever. Lord, help us to know that in you the chains of dysfunctional pasts, the chains of terrible habits, the change of destructive learnt behaviour.

Lord, that those chains can be broken and we can be set free and we can play our part in making your church the healing community which might enable those who have the particular gifts of healing to do their work.

work. So come Holy Spirit, we pray, inspire ourselves and provoke us, Father, to do what we need to do. In Jesus' name and to his glory and the people who agreed, said together, Amen.

Amen. Amen.