

Healing Presence

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Preacher: Rev. Suzy Kirkham

[0 : 0 0] Good morning everybody. Great. So it would be difficult for me to talk about this chapter without talking about healing. And healing there as we see is very much part of Jesus' story and of the early church's story too. The story shows Peter and John healing a man in the power of Jesus' name. And it's a great story, but more than that it shows us that Jesus loves to heal and that Peter and John and us can be part of that story too. So when I read stories like this, they build my faith and they raise my expectations, which sometimes I have to admit can be quite low. And I see God has the power to do amazing things and God is on the move.

So let's break the story down a bit. So Peter and John are going to pray and they come across a lame man that's been lame for many years, 30, 40 years, and he's there at the gate to the temple. He's been put there because he's lame and I think he's a bit street savvy because he realises that where he's positioned, that's where he might get the most cash each day as people are walking backwards and forwards as he's begging. But it says that he's there every single day. Now I don't know what the response would be to him, but I imagine that even if each day he gets a few coins tossed in his hat or whatever he's got there, actually a lot of the time people will just blatantly ignore him or pretend they haven't seen him.

And I think that this is why Peter bends down to him and talks to him directly. He gives him his full attention. When Peter says, silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give to you in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk. Peter had something much better to give him than money. What he had was simple, but I think it needed a lot of courage and boldness because he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

And I love the next bit when it goes on to say that he bent down and helped him up. So God's power healed the guy, but actually Peter was used to get down and help him up. And I wonder whether Peter had maybe seen this when he'd been following Jesus and Jesus had been healing people, whether Jesus had modeled that to him. The next thing that happens is that the guy is healed instantly.

There's no recovery period. He's completely healed. He's jumping about and praising God. So he's instantly transformed and the people will have seen this. Verse nine goes on to say, when all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man that used to sit begging at the temple and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

[3 : 02] So this was an amazing God moment. All of them knew the chap. They'd seen him there day after day after day. So they would know that God had healed him. It would have completely transformed their thinking, I imagine. And in those days, in that society, if you were disabled, you were kind of like the lowest of the low. So that transformation there would have just changed his whole life forever and the people that were around him. And then Peter goes on to say to the crowd, well, you've seen me do this. Why has it surprised you that I've done it? So he was bold and courageous because he had the Holy Spirit on him. Now for us, when we approach the subject of healing, I think we need to remember that God is free to do whatever pleases him. And I really want to add straight away that what pleases him is to always act in love towards us. He always wants to bless his children, but he doesn't always choose to make us happy. Blessedness is different to happiness. And in the

Bible, we don't see God promise or guarantee perfect healing before Jesus returns again. And as a result, we're living in that tension, which I think we've talked about before, which is the now and the not yet. Sometimes we see God's kingdom breaking in. That's the now. And sometimes we don't.

That's the not yet. This is the mystery of the kingdom. This is a mysterious kingdom theology. So we can't pin our promises on God, saying he's definitely going to heal. And we also can't limit God with what might be helpful for our eternal destinies. It needs to be God's agenda, not ours.

And I confess that very often, I have a really good plan. In fact, I have a great plan. And God says, do you know what? That's lovely, Suzanne, but actually, I'm going to do something different there.

And I get really frustrated about that. And I don't know whether that kind of rings any bells with you guys there. But when we approach the subject of healing, we always have to enter the mystery of our relationship with God. The kingdom of God is a mystery.

[5 : 20] Now, there's a chap called Alexander Ventner, and he's written a brilliant book called Doing Healing. And I'd just like to read a little excerpt from that book, which I think is really helpful in explaining, but now and the not yet to us. Healing is a mystery. When I think I have healing worked out, I find that what happens and doesn't happen confuses me. I think I know, but I realise only God knows.

The God of surprises heals when you least expect it. At times of little or no faith, we may merely go through the motions and healing happens. I have even seen people miraculously healed who did not even ask for healing. And then when after intense prayer and fasting, when you think healing is taking place, apparently nothing happens. I know godly people who have suffered and have faithfully prayed for decades without receiving physical healing. These and other contradictions raise many questions, some of which can be answered, while others often remain unanswered.

And we must be humble about the limits of our knowledge and respectful of the mystery of God's kingdom and its war against evil. So I found this really helpful because I think that sometimes we can really struggle with this subject. And unfortunately, I think we've got to have a file in our brains called unknown until we get to heaven. And it's okay to have a file like that. And I've definitely got quite a few questions that I'm going to be asking God when I get there. There might be people here today who have had long-term illnesses, or who are caring for those with long-term illnesses.

And it's incredibly draining and tough to be in that place an extended time. And really hard if actually you've gone for prayer and you've not seen a physical healing. But in the midst of those situations, I know that God loves to be near us in that painful place, providing comfort, strength, and hope. So sometimes we see healing and sometimes we don't. And even when we don't see it, we still have to be expectant and ask God, would you come and heal? If we go to the doctors and we get some kind of diagnosis and they sort our medication out, and then we're finding it's not working properly, we don't just think, no, I've been to the doctor, I'm not going back again. We go back. And I think that's what we've got to do with God as well. We're expectant and we continue to ask. We see in the Bible that God heals again and again. We know that the Lord loves to heal. So we have to do something difficult as Christians. We have to stand in that gap in attention and not lean on two extremes.

Standing in the gap between Christians that think God never heals, it's not going to happen, it's ceased, and actually the other extreme, which is God's always going to heal. And if he doesn't heal, you know, there's something wrong with you. There are two extremes that I've heard which are not very helpful. When Jesus died and rose again, that gap was created. The kingdom is here, but it's not here in all its fullness. It's frustrating, but it's in heaven that we're going to experience perfect healing.

[8 : 51] But in this time before heaven, we want to be constantly pressing into the Lord and saying, Lord, let your kingdom come. Jesus wants us to be full of the Holy Spirit and praying for the sick.

Healing, as I said, can bring out two healthy extremes, which is why we need to hold this kingdom tension. In the past, I've heard somebody praying with somebody in a different church to this, and they were trying to be really helpful, but they said to somebody, you're already healed, but you know what? You don't know it yet.

But what if we're not? What is the reality of the situation? We need to be real about what's going on, but at the same time, expect that the Lord can and does heal. Imagine if the church stopped praying for healing because it's too difficult. Well, if we do that, we're not going to see any healing, are we? And surely as a church, we want to partner with Jesus when the kingdom of God is breaking in.

If we go back to the passage in verse 6, Peter said, silver or gold I don't have, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ, stand up and walk.

So when we see miracles happen, we can often think that we need to use magic or special words. They must be said to promote and produce the miracle. But God isn't a slot machine.

[10 : 18] Putting the correct prayer in and getting the right result out doesn't work. It doesn't work like that. Peter uses simple words. And I must say, I find it a bit unnerving how simple they were.

You would have thought that he would have think, this is going to be tricky. This guy's been lame for 30, 40 years. I need to pull out my best prayer in order to get God to do it. But actually, no. He knew who Jesus was.

And his prayer revealed his thoughts about God. And I think it's the same for us. Our prayers reveal our thoughts about God. And practically, when we pray for people, I believe that we really need to listen to the Lord more, even if it's a bit uncomfortable to be quiet. In that time of quiet, we can be waiting. We're not just sitting there absently. We're listening. What is the Holy Spirit saying? Maybe ask for revelation.

What's going on here? Are there any underlying issues? Often the physical ailments can be linked to psychological wounds. Sometimes unresolved issues confess to her. Sometimes the more words we use, the less we listen, and the less healing there is. Imagine if someone came up to you for healing, and you just said, I'm going to be quiet for a minute. The person might think, no, I wanted a brilliant pair straight away. But it's when we're quiet, we hear those nuggets from the Lord.

We're actually acknowledging that we require the Holy Spirit's leading, rather than doing it in our own strength. We don't need lengthy prayers. We don't need magic prayers, that, you know, wonderful flowery prayers. God knows better than we do what's going on. That's why it's important to listen.

[12 : 09] When we're praying with God, and praying for people, we're partnering with the Lord, who's always moving. We don't need to beg him, and we don't need to be stingy.

It's also okay to be direct with our prayers. We don't need to beat around the bush, using flowery words to flatter God. God already knows what we need before we pray it, and Jesus prayed like that because he had great intimacy with the Father and great authority. We can also make the mistake that only special people can pray for healing. We can come to that conclusion, that it's only people that have this unique relationship with God that can do it. But actually, Peter dispels that.

He's keen to deflect the glory. He knew it was all about Jesus. So you don't have to be a special person for a miracle to be released through you and your prayers. Jesus is the only one divine healer.

It is true that some people are used more frequently than others to heal the sick. You might say that they have the gift of healing or an anointing that's been said over people.

But the practice of healing has been given to the whole church, all of us, as we see in the mandate from Matthew when it says, the kingdom of God has come near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons, freely have received, freely give, and teach them to obey everything I've commanded you. So we believe in healing and transformational church. Everyone can be involved. We're all commissioned to do this. Years ago, when I had not prayed for anybody and I was really worried about doing it, I just got paired up with somebody from the prayer ministry team that looked like they knew what they were doing and that's how I learned. I just had a go. Imagine if everyone in this room today was commissioned and released to our communities this week to pray for maybe 10 people. What a load of prayers for healing that would be.

[14 : 14] That will just be walking in the commission that Jesus gives us. We all get to do it. God really longs to use us, so don't disqualify yourselves by thinking, I've not been a Christian long enough, I don't know how to pray, I'm not very good at praying with people. Nobody's disqualified.

There are some helpful things that we can learn in the process of doing it well, but at the heart of it, we can all pray for the sick. And I want to say at this point, if you're nervous about praying with people, maybe start doing it in your home group, just pray in that safe place together. Maybe go on Clive's ministry training that he runs quite regularly.

That's really good to go and learn there. Join the prayer ministry team and again, stand with somebody that looks like they know what they're doing and follow their lead. That's what I did. And then you're just going to be in that environment to learn.

So Lord, thank you that you're here this morning, Lord, and what you've been doing this morning through and with us, Lord, and for your healing power. Lord, help us to remember that whatever's going on, that whatever we see, that you're always working in our lives, Lord. And help us to stand in that gap, in that tension of the now and the not yet.

Lord, thank you for this community here. And I just pray a blessing on them, Lord. Bring us peace, Lord, and bring us healing. Amen.