

HOW Mission Community & KSAT Worship Service for 7th March 2021. Theme: Prayer and divine healing (2)

Thank you to Alan Pallister for the second service on the theme of prayer and healing.

Opening reading: *Psalm 125*

Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds His people both now and forevermore. The sceptre of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous, for then the righteous might use their hands to do evil.

LORD, do good to those who are good, to those who are upright in heart. But those who turn to crooked ways the LORD will banish with the evildoers. Peace be on Israel.

HYMN MP 251 – How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoPlwPUYWaw>

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds, and drives away his fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole and calms the troubled breast;
'Tis manna to the hungry soul, and to the weary, rest.

Dear name! the rock on which I build, my shield and hiding place,
My never-failing treasury filled with boundless stores of grace!

Jesus! my Shepherd, Saviour, Friend, my Prophet, Priest, and King;
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End, accept the praise I bring.

Weak is the effort of my heart, and cold my warmest thought;
But when I see Thee as Thou art, I'll praise Thee as I ought.

Till then I would Thy love proclaim with every fleeting breath,
And may the music of Thy name refresh my soul in death.

PRAYER OF WORSHIP AND THANKSGIVING

Lord, we praise You today as a Holy and just God. You created all things and sustain them by Your great power. You created men and women to live for Your glory and to serve You, in perfect harmony with Your wonderful creation. When our first parents, Adam and Eve, sinned against You, preferring to believe the lies of the tempter, even at that time You revealed Your great plan to redeem mankind from their sin, through their offspring (Jesus). This was Your promise of a Saviour, who would come into the world like one of us, would live a perfect life and would die a cruel death for the salvation of sinful men – for the salvation of each one of us.

The name of Jesus is indeed sweet in a believer's ear because He is the One who, in His great love, gave Himself for us on Calvary and brought us back into fellowship with Yourself. We could do nothing to save ourselves and our good works were like filthy rags. But You led us to Jesus, our Saviour, who is also our Lord and our Life.

Not only did Jesus give us our eternal salvation, through faith in Him: He has also given us many temporal blessings, healing us from many sicknesses and sparing us from the worst consequences of our own mistakes and sins. We thank You for our families; we thank You for the shelter and warmth of our homes and the food and clothing You give us.

We thank You because, in this period of worldwide suffering, You have answered our prayers for the many who were ill and comforted the families of those who, for reasons unknown to us, lost their loved ones.

You have given medical researchers the necessary abilities to discover vaccinations to protect us from this illness. You have given pharmaceutical companies the means to be able to supply them in huge numbers. We thank You for human governments, often led by those who do not know or recognise You, but whom You nevertheless guide as they seek to organise the distribution of these vaccinations.

We thank You for Your gracious promise that You will always be present where two are three are gathered in Your name. In that confidence, we pray Your blessing for this time of worship together. In Jesus' name we pray **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

HYMN MP 50 –Be still, for the presence of the Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APvI38MO0UA>

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here;
Come bow before Him now with reverence and fear
In Him no sin is found, we stand on holy ground.

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;
He burns with holy fire, with splendour He is crowned:
How awesome is the sight, our radiant King of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place:
He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister His grace -
No work too hard for Him, in faith receive from Him.

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

Matthew 8: 16-17

When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases."

1 Peter 2.18-25.

Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth."

When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly. "He himself bore our sins" in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by His wounds you have been healed." For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND INTERCESSION:

In view of the price Jesus paid for our eternal salvation, promising our resurrection through His own victory over death, we ask Your forgiveness that we have often been so short-sighted in our concerns and prayers. We have been indifferent about neighbours and work-colleagues who do not know You, even though we know that those who die without knowing You are lost for eternity.

We have often been greedy in the use of the resources You give us and do not respond as Jesus did, in His compassion, to those who are poor, homeless or tormented by the powers of evil.

We live in a society where Your priorities have often been ignored and morality has moved far away from Your standards. As churches who seek to honour You, we are aware that we often do not have the courage - or find the means - to oppose government measures which allow sin to abound. We confess that, were our sins and those of our society to be justly punished, the consequences would be much worse than all that the pandemic has brought.

We confess the times even during this past week when we have been indifferent to Your commands and disobeyed You in thoughts and in actions.

Lord, in your Mercy, hear our prayers and forgive us our sins and those of our society and churches

We have been deeply saddened at the numbers who have died of Covid. We pray for justice in the world-wide distribution of vaccinations. We pray for the National Health Service, for health workers who are over-tired, under great pressure and exposed to the threat of infection. We pray for those who are ill with other serious illnesses and, owing to the pressures of Covid, are not receiving adequate medical attention.

We pray for those we know who are elderly and those whose illnesses seem to be terminal – that they will feel the comfort of Your presence as many of them are not even able to receive the visits of their families. We pray that we ourselves may be ready to meet You, at the time of our death: We pray that we will hear Your word of approval as, by Your grace, we are able to lead fruitful lives in Your service.

We pray for wisdom and grace for the ministers, preachers, leaders and administrators in this circuit, that You will enable them by Your grace to maintain the churches as beacons and lights in the darkness of the world around them. We pray that You will enable the churches to re-open, strengthening their present members and bringing to them new human resources, through the conversion of others or through new families moving into the area.

We also pray for the witness of all churches in this area, that together we may seek to proclaim Your message of salvation.

We pray Your blessing and the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit for this service, as Your Word is opened up to us.

Lord; in your mercy; hear our prayers.

Scripture reading: James 5:13-16.

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they 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 person is powerful and effective.

HYMN MP 232 – His hands were pierced

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxxJNofi_Xo

His hands were pierced, the hands that made the mountain range and everglade;
That washed the stains of sin away and changed earth's darkness into day.

His feet were pierced, the feet that trod the furthest shining star of God;
And left their imprint deep and clear on every winding pathway here.

His heart was pierced, the heart that burned, to comfort every heart that yearned;
And from it came a cleansing flood, the river of redeeming blood.

His hands and feet and heart, all three were pierced for me on Calvary;
And here and now, to Him I bring my hands, feet, heart, an offering.

Message: Prayer and Divine Healing (2) James 5:13-16

Last week, we said that James recommends three ways to pray for divine healing: **(1)** you can pray for yourself, **(2)** you can call the elders of the church to pray for you and **(3)** you can pray for one another as fellowships. I want to say more today about the second way and then go on to talk about the third.

I suggested the 'prayer of faith' mentioned in *James 5* could be associated with the gifts of the Spirit, listed by Paul in *1 Corinthians 12:9 & 28*, especially the gifts of faith and healing. Faith in the Bible is not just 'positive thinking' nor is it (as some teach) 'name it and claim it'. But, in *James 5:15* and in *1 Corinthians 12*, the gift of faith seems to be more than the faith that we place in Christ for salvation. It appears to be a special additional gift, given to some individuals, to be exercised for the good of the whole church. We submit to God's will, not knowing what He is going to do and, as we pray, God, sometimes, implants in us a conviction that He will heal our sicknesses. Our prayers are 'led': often they don't continue or end as they started. In *Romans 8:26-27* we see this process of the Spirit praying in and through us – *'Likewise, the Spirit also helps us in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God'*.

Let me give you a personal example. In 2014 I had recently handed over the responsibility as pastor in our church in Portugal, and my wife, Celeste, and I had agreed not to attend for a year, to leave Pastor Paulo Francisco, our successor, free to lead according to his vision. During that time Celeste needed gall-bladder surgery, and sadly the operation went wrong. She suffered major organ failure and septicaemia and was not expected to live. She was rushed the same day to a bigger hospital, where she had a further operation.

The new pastor called our former church together for an emergency prayer-meeting, to pray, they said, that the Lord would be with our family and give us courage as we prepared to lose Celeste. During the prayer-meeting – and this is the point I want to emphasise – the Lord led the church to pray differently. Somehow, at the end of the meeting, they were praying with real conviction that Celeste would be healed. The following morning we were given the wonderful news that the infection hadn't developed. Celeste needed to be placed in an induced coma for ten days – but she was expected to recover. From that moment on I felt quite sure she would.

We learned that a dedicated doctor had spent the whole night studying the situation, to see if anything could be done. Later she said she did this as if Celeste was her own mother. So, we see, that God uses dedicated professionals, even those who may not be believers.

Yes, when we pray, we can be led by wishful thinking or even demand a positive answer from God, and we are mistaken. But I believe there are times when He really does lead us to pray in faith, in the conviction that what we are asking is in His will.

But our text in *James* raises another important issue here. Spiritual healing may, at times, also involve the need for confession of sin and repentance, as much a part of healing as physical healing (and probably more important!). At such a time, it will be important for the church elders/leaders to be involved and for those with gifts of faith and/or healing to be accountable to the church leadership. Look at the beautiful way the spiritual and physical issues are brought together in *Isaiah 53:4-5*: *Surely He took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered Him punished by God, stricken by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed.*

(3) This brings me – to the third way of praying at times of sickness – **praying for one another**, (*James 5v16*). This is something we can all do and are expected to do! Not all healing situations – whether physical or spiritual – will need to be brought to the elders. We meet in church, in small groups or just in twos and threes, where we can always pray for each other. Many of us have a natural reticence in admitting our needs (and our sins!) to our brothers and sisters. But *James'* teaching here is that all believers are priests, in the sense that we can share and pray

for each other – whether for physical or spiritual healing. In the same spirit, Paul says in 1 *Thessalonians 5:14*: *“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the faint-hearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all”*.

Here, as in *Isaiah 53*, the solution for sin and the solution for sickness are brought together. A godly, upright man may pray with great effect. But his prayer should be with energy and God-given conviction. The original Greek for “fervent, effectual” (v16) means “energised”: God gives us His energy, as we pray in faith. We need to avoid mechanical repeated prayers.

In conclusion, Scripture encourages us all to pray at all times and in all situations. Here, in James, the main issue is the “prayer of faith”, which may be granted in some situations but not all. It is not something we can ‘work up’ nor is it usually a substitute for medical treatment: God works out His purposes through His use of ‘special grace’ and of ‘common grace’ too. The kind of prayer James recommends is not a magic secret for instantaneous healing – though the healing may in some cases be instantaneous. If the healing comes gradually, or if it brings us only partial relief from our suffering, is that any the less an answer to prayer? Cannot our sovereign God use medical means and dedicated health-workers, as well as ‘instantaneous miracles’? I think this is certainly what most of us will have been asking Him to do in the present circumstances.

God calls us all to dedicate ourselves to persistent prayer – in church, in small groups (as soon as that is possible) or in ones and twos. It is true that we sometimes struggle, like Jacob, to find or even recognise God’s answers. Sometimes we get it wrong. But our experience in Carlisle has been to pray with faith, conviction and energy, (often through Zoom), and we have received some really positive answers. We believe He will continue to encourage us and give us pleasant surprises - in His goodness and grace.

Of course, when a believer dies, after we prayed for him or her, believing that we did so in faith, that need not be taken as a sign of failure. It certainly does not mean that God wasn’t true to His promise, either.

Let us conclude by looking at *Isaiah 53:10-11*(NKJV) again.

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labour of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities..

Here, in this life, we receive part of this blessing, like a partial payment which is a guarantee of our complete inheritance. Paul says, *‘And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of His glory.’* (*Ephesians 1:13-14*)

This may mean our healing from some illnesses, according to God’s sovereign will and leading. It will certainly not bring complete healing to all believers in this life and it will leave many unanswered questions as to why some are healed and others are not healed. But experience teaches us that there are many situations in which the “prayer of faith” does heal the sick even here and now. *James 5:16b* is a wonderful and firm promise to us, that prayer is powerful and effective. Would that we would believe that and put it into practice!

I leave the challenge to you to pray earnestly, seeking to be enabled by His grace, to do so in faith and asking the Lord to guide you in all things in His sovereign wisdom. **Amen**

HYMN MP 1072 –In Christ alone our hope is
found <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENtLi4GbE>

In Christ alone my hope is found, He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace, when fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My comforter, my all in all; here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone, who took on flesh, fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness, scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid; here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay, Light of the World by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious day up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory, sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine, bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home; here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and for evermore. **AMEN.**