

HOW Mission Community & KSAT Worship Service for 28th February2021. Theme: Prayer and divine healing (1)

Thank you to Alan Pallister for the next two weeks services on the theme of prayer and healing – a relevant and Scriptural topic. The teaching will be covered in two parts – and is a challenge in these days of pandemic (and any other days, come to that!). One of God's names in the Bible is *Jehovah Rapha*, which means the 'God who heals'.

Opening reading: Psalm 117

Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is His love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD.

HYMN MP 751 – When all Your mercies, O my God(v3 not in MP but on link)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0Zm_bTCbLM

When all Thy mercies, O my God, my rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I'm lost in wonder, love and praise.

Unnumbered comforts on my soul, Thy tender care bestowed
Before my infant heart conceived from whom these blessings flowed.

When worn with sickness, oft hast Thou with health renewed my face;
And when in sins and sorrows sunk, revived my soul with grace

Ten thousand, thousand precious gifts my daily thanks employ;
Nor is the least a cheerful heart that tastes those gifts with joy.

Through every period of my life, Thy goodness I'll pursue;
And after death, in distant worlds, the glorious theme renew.

Through all eternity, to Thee, a joyful song I'll raise;
But oh, eternity's too short to utter all Thy praise!

(Joseph Addison, an early 18th-century politician and essayist, co-founder of "The Spectator", suffered from poor health and died at a relatively early age but often sensed God's help. v3 is particularly pertinent in his circumstances!).

Prayer of worship and thanksgiving:

Lord, we gather together in Your presence to praise You for Your great mercy and love in showing Yourself to us. As sinners, we only deserved Your just anger and condemnation but, through the sacrificial death of Your Son, You poured out Your grace on us. You called us and brought us to Yourself. You forgave our sins, letting Your Son die an awful death on the cross in our place, so that we could be forgiven and declared just. You have poured out Your Spirit on all believers and, through Him, You continue to speak to the hearts of those who do not know You.

Every morning, as we rise, we survey Your mercies and unnumbered comforts. Often, when we are sick, You renew us with health. You revive us in times when we suffer from depression. You comfort us when loved ones are taken from us. We thank you for our families- and for our many friends and for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

You have given us a task, which is sometimes daunting, but always deeply satisfying, when we take steps to obey You – to tell others about the gospel of Your grace and to help them to come to be part of Your family.

Be with us today, we pray, and may Your Word and everything we think, say and do be to Your praise and be pleasing to You. May this time of worship renew and transform our lives.

We pray all these things in Jesus' name, **Amen**.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

OLD TESTAMENT READING: *Isaiah 52:13 -53:12.*

See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness—so he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

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. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away.

Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

HYMN MP 663 The Price is

Paid<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7iaZGirgyCM>

(The third verse speaks very clearly on today's theme: *The price is paid, and by that scourging cruel, He took our sicknesses as if our own. And by His wounds, His body broken there, His healing touch may now by faith be known.*)

The price is paid, come let us enter in to all that Jesus died to make our own
For every sin, more than enough He gave and bought our freedom from each guilty stain

*The price is paid. Alleluia. Amazing grace, so strong and sure
And so with all my heart, my life in every part, I live to thank You for the price You paid.*

The price is paid: see Satan flee away, for Jesus crucified destroys his power
No more to pay, let accusation cease; in Christ there is no condemnation now

The price is paid and by that scourging cruel, He took our sicknesses as if His own
And by His wounds, His body broken there, His healing touch may now by faith be known.

The price is paid 'Worthy the Lamb' we cry; eternity shall never cease His praise
The church of Christ shall rule upon the earth; in Jesus' name we have authority.

Prayers of confession and intercession:

Lord, we are so aware of the way we go astray like sheep. We know Your commandments and often do not obey. We cling to our comfort zones and material belongings and are slow to tell others the good news that Jesus, led to the slaughter like a lamb, was the gift God gave for their eternal salvation.

We often fail to thank You and take the food, clothing and houses You have given us for granted. We often forget the plight of those who live in poverty and are unemployed. We do not

stand up, as we ought, in favour of the wonderful world You created, and which we men and women have placed in severe danger through our carelessness and greed.

We often read Your Word and pray in an attitude of routine and sometimes neglect the opportunities to have fellowship with our brothers and sisters.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers

We hear the words of Jesus, 'Your sins are forgiven in my Name. Go and sin no more'. And, Lord God, we give You our thanks.

Lord we pray for the governments of the world, the World Health Assembly and the scientists, who seek solutions for this pandemic of Covid 19. We thank you for the vaccinations, but we pray that poorer countries will not be left behind, as vaccination programs proceed. We pray that many will understand that You are the One who has been with us and challenging us through the tragedy of this pandemic and that many will turn again to You. We pray that those in positions of leadership will be guided by You and come to know You as Lord and Saviour.

We pray that You will comfort and strengthen the families of those who have died as a result of Covid 19 or of other illnesses, which could not be adequately treated during this critical time. We pray for a genuine spiritual revival in this country and others. As You are working powerfully in many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America we pray that You will revive your work in other countries, including our own, which in the past were considered examples of Your truth and now have rejected You and Your way.

We pray for the ministers and preachers You have called to serve you in this Kirkby Stephen, Appleby and Tebay area, in the Methodist Church and other Christian denominations which seek to proclaim the truth of Your message.

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayers! Amen

NEW TESTAMENT 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 548 – Our blest Redeemer, ere He breathed

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CLJHH5PK1w>(v2&3 not on video clip)

Our blest Redeemer, ere He breathed, His tender last farewell,
A Guide, a Comforter, bequeathed with us to dwell.

He came in semblance of a dove with sheltering wings outspread,
The holy balm of peace and love on earth to shed.

He came in tongues of living flame to teach, convince, subdue;
All-powerful as the wind He came, as viewless too.

He came sweet influence to impart, a gracious, willing Guest,
While He can find one humble heart wherein to rest.

And His that gentle voice we hear, soft as the breath of even,
That checks each fault, that calms each fear, and speaks of heaven.

And every virtue we possess, and every conquest won,
And every thought of holiness, are His alone.

Spirit of purity and grace, our weakness, pitying, see:
O make our hearts Thy dwelling place and worthier Thee.

MESSAGE: Prayer and divine healing – (1)

My wife, Celeste and I have the privilege of belonging to a small evangelical church in Carlisle which prays earnestly for sick people. We have seen some clear answers to our prayers and in some cases go on praying, awaiting God's answers. Sometimes praying is a struggle and we find we have to change our expectations.

Like many of you, no doubt, we are firm believers in praying for healing, physical and spiritual. In *Isaiah 53:4-6* spiritual healing – deliverance from sin – and physical healing are brought together. God ensures both through the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus. But the full physical healing we long for may be withheld in this life and granted only in our resurrection.

We know, from all the gospels, that there was an abundance of physical healing miracles in Jesus' ministry. We know that miraculous healings were part of the visible signs which were proofs of Jesus', and later the apostles', ministries. But I believe that the gift of healing, which God gives to some believers today, doesn't often lead to instantaneous miracles like that (though occasionally it may!). Unfortunately, because of this, many theologians came to the conclusion that there are no healing miracles at all today. Calvin (commenting *James 5:14* – '*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*') said that "the gift of healing was temporary". Despite my admiration for Calvin, I disagree with his conclusion: after all, this text is part of the Scriptures, our supreme authority! While it is true that some instantaneous, obviously miraculous healings may occur today, many are in fact gradual and less obviously miraculous, but are none the less clearly God's work.

In this very brief, concise passage James in fact teaches three ways we should pray if we are sick. I believe that all should be put into practice. The present situation of lockdown and social distancing may not allow us to practise all of them literally at this time, but they teach us important principles.

(1) The first way James teaches us to pray, may seem very obvious: "**pray for yourselves**" (v13). Instead of fretting against God or falling into depression, we can pray for comfort. *Psalm 61:1-2* says: "*Hear my cry, O God; attend to my prayer. From the end of the earth, I will cry to You. When my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I*".

We can pray for wisdom. In the words of *Psalm 143:10*: "*Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; Your Spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness*".

We can pray for deliverance, as we read in *Psalm 6:2*: "*Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled*"

James also teaches us to sing praises when we are cheerful. I don't think I will need to give examples of psalms we could use at those times!

So why are we often so reluctant to pray or sing praises?

(2) The second way to respond, if we are ill is to "**call for the elders of the church**". This could be when the illness doesn't allow us to leave our house or our bed, but not necessarily so. I hope to talk about this second resource in greater detail.

Notice first that James doesn't say the sick person should just *wait* for a visit from the elders (ministers/ church leader): he recommends calling them. Often, people will wait for a church leader to take the initiative – but James says to send for them – to pray and anoint with oil.

The only person I ever anointed with oil, in the presence of the church leaders, was my wife, Celeste! In 2004 she developed what looked like a melanoma on her leg. We called the elders of the church (including myself!) and we prayed and anointed her with oil. We were all rather nervous as we followed these instructions, and there was no instantaneous cure. A few days later, we could see that the melanoma was changing to a 'ring' shape. We attached no significance to that at first, but a retired English doctor, visiting the centre where we lived, examined Celeste's tumour and found in some rather old medical journals that a ring-shaped tumour of this kind is not malignant (more recent medical research does not completely confirm that idea). Celeste ended up by having a small local operation to remove the tumour and she recovered completely. So, what could we conclude? Was the growth was never malignant, or

was it malignant and became benign? Her medical reports stated clearly that it was malignant! Whatever the truth of the matter was, there was no doubt that God had answered our prayers! There is another important truth to be learnt here. Most healings that take place in answer to prayer are not instantaneous, in the generally accepted sense of miracles. God uses doctors and the resources of science as part of His healing process. But we should still follow James' instructions all the same. Calling for the elders of the church, isn't usually meant to be an alternative to going to the doctor! Some extreme teaching has led to some people neglecting normal medical treatment, which can be a serious mistake. God seems to work more through prayer (with or without anointing) **and** medicine – not prayer **or** medicine!

(The anointing with oil is not a 'magic formula' for healing, but a symbol of God's grace poured out through prayer)

So, how do we understand what James refers to as the "prayer of faith"? Some have said that the only guaranteed healing, that the "prayer of faith" can bring to us, is healing in the *spiritual* sense – forgiveness of sin. Certainly, that will often be a priority. But, this passage speaks of healing from sickness.

On the other hand, we have the "healing campaign" approach – usually large meetings led by a preacher who has been given (or claims to have) the gift of healing. Many of these campaigns are genuine, but there have been 'bogus' ones as well, which sadly discredit God's genuine work and this passage in James.

My belief is that the elders should be called and that, if a "prayer of faith" is offered, the sick will be healed. But God, in His sovereign wisdom, doesn't always grant us the possibility of praying in faith. I don't refer to saving faith, which is granted to all believers. And I am not talking about what some call "positive thinking". I believe James here is speaking about what the Apostle Paul describes as faith as a spiritual gift (*1 Corinthians 12:9*). It is the capacity to discern what God wants to do in certain situations. It discerns much more than human reason can and the believer is led to step out "in faith". *1 Corinthians 12:9* also speaks of the gift of healing. I believe this is often a particular form of the gift of faith, when God gives a special conviction that He will bring healing to the one who is ill.

Let me give you a personal example. In 2009 our youngest son, Andrew, suffered a very serious car accident which left him with multiple fractures. Four others were seriously injured too but mercifully all ended up by recovering. After Andrew began to recover, he developed a hospital infection, which again almost killed him. Our church, in Portugal, was given the conviction that he would be healed. At the time of the infection, I remember driving to the hospital, believing, at the beginning of the journey, that we would lose Andrew; and then (rather mysteriously!) gaining the conviction, before we reached the hospital in Lisbon, that he would get better.

I can't tell the whole story here. But the physiotherapist who worked with Andrew was a Christian. He told us that in over 20 years' work in physiotherapy he had never seen a patient in Andrew's condition recover so quickly and he was fully aware of the importance of the prayers of God's people! Andrew was expected to be in a wheelchair for weeks or months. He was discharged on the day of our church prayer meeting, where people were praying for him. The rather spectacular, immediate answer to their prayers was when Andrew *walked* into the meeting on his own two feet!

God gave faith to His people to believe Andrew would be healed. Of course, he was helped by many doctors, nurses and physiotherapists. We didn't anoint him with oil. But, if he had asked us to do that, as a symbolic expression of our faith, I am sure we would have done so.

In the next message I hope to look at some other aspects of healing, such as the relation between physical illness and sin and the (often perplexing) question as to why God doesn't always heal our sicknesses in this life. We will continue looking at the second way James tells us to pray for healing (call the church elders) and then, finally, we will look at the third way (pray for each other)

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**HYMN MP 1008 –The Lord’s My
Shepherd**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN4tPkX0MG0>

The Lord’s my shepherd, I’ll not want;He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,His goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in You alone, and I will trust in You alone,
For Your endless mercy follows me, Your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness, and He anoints my head with oil,
And my cup, it overflows with joy,I feast on His pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path,I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff are the comfort I need to know.

CLOSING PRAYER(*Jude vv.24-25*)

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless,before the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy. To God, our Saviour, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power,both now and forever.Amen.