

Healing

- In the beginning, when everything was new in the world, when God had finished creating all things, he said that it was good.
 - He crowned his creation by fashioning Adam and Eve. These two enjoyed life, enjoyed each other and enjoyed God.
 - They had purpose. They had all their needs met. They were satisfied.
 - They did not suffer from doubts and depression. They were not worried about anything.
 - They did not have guilt or shame that haunted them. They did not have to worry about broken relationships or troubled relatives.
 - They did not get sick, get a cold or get the flu. They did not even age. There was no arthritis, cancer, AIDS or heart disease. They didn't ache when they woke up in the morning.
 - It was an amazing life filled with every possible blessing and it was good.
 - But as you all know, it didn't stay that way. They chose to live life apart from God, taking control and doing things their own way. They sinned and the world for humanity was never the same again.
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- People began to get sick. Their lives got shorter and shorter. Disease and death became the norm.
 - We don't have records much from the ancient world, but do know that since Jesus, there have been some of the worst plagues in human history.
 - The plague of Justinian around 550 AD reached the capital of the Byzantine empire and at its height is reputed to have killed up to 10K per day, reaching a total of 25 million before it ended.
 - The black plague is the famous one in Europe around 1350 AD that by the end had killed half the population of Europe, or around 50 million people.
 - In 1855 the so called "Third Pandemic" that started in China is estimated to have killed 15 million people worldwide before it subsided.
 - What a long fall from the beginning, but look what the end of the story will be like.
Revelation 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." 5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."
 - That is going to be amazing. Fantastic. And it gets more fantastic every year that I get older.
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- But what do we do in the meantime? Do we simply live with and suffer with what is going on in our lives? Consider what your felt needs are at this current moment.
 - Are they relational needs? Situational needs like your living situation or money? Are they spiritual needs? Mental needs like being stuck, depressed or just needing understanding? Are the physical needs because you are sick?
 - We are finishing the bible book of James this morning. We have spent the last 3 months in looking through this amazing letter that James, the half-brother of Jesus wrote to a bunch of Christ-followers in the the years after Jesus died and rose again.
 - The whole point of the letter is to encourage them that **AUTHENTIC FAITH PRODUCES AUTHENTIC DEEDS**. What we believe and who we follow will show up in how we live.

- James closes his letter by talking about prayer and healing.
- Our church is part of a denomination called the Christian & Missionary Alliance.
- Many of you have seen our logo on posters, letterhead, bulletin and elsewhere.
- It represents the core beliefs about who Jesus is.
- Jesus is our Savior – there is no one and no way else to God except through Jesus.
- Jesus is our Sanctifier – we are set apart by God when we come to him and only he can make us holy and he does this through our entire lives as we submit to him.
- Jesus is our Coming King – he is returning some day in victory and power and we will live forever with him in an amazing and remarkable existence.
- The last one is this: Jesus is our healer.
- Jesus came to earth to live as one of us and die in our place so that we might have salvation, forgiveness of sins and
- Let me read these opening verses again.

James 5:13 Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. 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. 15 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. 16 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.

- There is way too much here for us to unpack all of it this morning, so I want to highlight several truths.

I. Jesus is still healing!

- I start here for several reasons:

A. Cessationism

- There are Christ-followers who teach that the miracles of healing only were for Jesus, or at best, for the 12 apostles after they followed Jesus.
- The healing was to kick-start the church and we cannot expect this kind of healing today.
- Yet this is absolutely unfounded.

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. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up.

- James' instructions were to Christ-followers everywhere.
- Many people prayed and people were healed in the early church that were not apostles.
- Jesus sent out all his disciples to heal people. We are told we will do even more than Jesus did.
- Most foundationally, healing is rooted in Jesus' death on the cross.

Matthew 8:14 When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. 15 He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. 16 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. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases."

- The Scripture that was referring to is this one.

Isaiah 53:4 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. 5 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.

- Jesus death was not only to affect our afterlife, but our current life.

B. Lack of Experience

- There are many who start with their experience and develop their theology, their belief system about God, rather than the other way around.
- So many people have never seen or experienced any kind of healing.
- They have prayed for people who died anyway. Who did not get better.
- When someone got better, it was indistinguishable from what might have happened anyway.
- After a while, we come to the unconscious conclusion that healing just isn't one of those things that happens. What's worse, we become skeptical and cynical about stories of healing of about those who boldly pray for healing.
- This truth is important. My lack of experience does not define what God is willing or able to do. Faith often involves looking past our experience and trust in what God says.

II. God is a God of first, not last, resort.

- The issue is rarely what we do, it is the priority and order in which we do it.
James 5:13 Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. 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.
- When we have problems, when life is not working out, take it to God first.
- When things are good and we are blessed, thank God first.
- When we are sick and in need of healing, we are to go to God first.
- This is less about timing. Obviously if you have a medical need, go take care of it. Respond to your situation.
- The issue James addresses, as always, is attitude.
- Many times by the time people ask to be prayed for, they have already exhausted everything else, nothing is working, and so they figure, "I might as well get prayer – it can't hurt."
- Yet we are to go after God as the first priority, in the good and the bad.
- Why is this? God is not a fall back option. He is the author of all that is good and he is the one who is in control of all things, even in sickness. He is inviting us into that knowledge and live according to it.
- But if you are paying attention, James adds something for the one who is sick.
- We are to 1) call the elders to pray over them; and 2) anoint them with oil.
- What is this all about?
- There are several things going here but they center around a main idea.

III. God's desire is for restoration and healing.

- There are a couple of key phrases here that might have caught your eye or ear.
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. 15 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. 16 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. 17 Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.
- God promises to heal – is that a guarantee?
- He promises to forgive – what does that have to do with healing?

A. Humble yourself.

Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them

- Calling the elders of the church to pray requires a level of humility. It means admitting that things are not going well or as expected. It means asking for help. It means admitting that we cannot fix things ourselves. It means we cannot make it on our own.
- The elders are the leaders, the representatives of the local church. It's why we put such a high premium on the character of elders and their relationship with Jesus.
- The boldness with which we ask God for healing is to be tempered by humility.

B. Seek God's face, not his hands.

- I think that the reason many people are not healed is because all they want is God's healing and not more of God. They want God to fix their problems but are unwilling to repent and submit. God doesn't work that way.
- They want what God DOES (hands), but they don't necessarily want GOD (face).
- God sometimes uses sickness and trouble to build our faith.
- Sometimes he heals sickness to draw attention to himself and the Good news.
- And sometimes, sickness is the result of sin.

If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

- That's why James attaches confession to healing. If sickness is the result of sin, then trying to deal with the sickness without dealing with the sin is fruitless. Even if sin is not the cause of the sickness, God uses our troubles and sickness to expose our hearts and draw us to himself.
- Remember, God loves you so much he wants you to come to him and he wants to heal and restore all of you.
- We do not need to go on some secret sin hunt – the idea is that the person will know full well the nature of the sin.
- Notice that confession is not just between you and God. It is to be done in community. We are to confess our sins to each other. This requires honesty and vulnerability and humility. But is the path to freedom and to healing.
- The implication is that we must have people close enough to us who can inquire into our spiritual state.
- The Christ-followers should not live life apart from community. It's why we talk about DF's. It's why we say it must go beyond Sunday morning.
- This also widens prayer beyond the elders to everyone else in the entire body of Christ.

C. Boldly invite God to heal.

pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.

- Anointing with oil is not magic. The oil does nothing. It is not "blessed" or "sanctified." It does not make you kosher or something like that. Anointing a person is done to symbolize that the person is being set apart for God's special attention and care.
- The anointing is a subordinate action that goes along with prayer, but the main verb is to pray. Oil is the symbol, but prayer is how to tap into God's power.
- In the name of the Lord signifies that the healing is done solely in the power and will of God.
- We know we can do this boldly because if the prayer offered in faith will heal the sick person.
- While the person being prayed for must have faith, the emphasis here is on the faith of the people praying for the person.

- James uses the example of Elijah to encourage them. We don't have time to look back at this story from the OT, but James says that Elijah was like us – he had all the same sins, fallenness and stubbornness as every one of us – yet his prayer stopped the rains in the land for 3+ years
- Why? Because his prayers came from a trust and confidence in God, prayers offered in the confident expectation that God would hear and answer the prayer.
- We must strike a balance between never expecting God to heal and requiring him to heal on demand.
- It helps remember that the purpose of Elijah's prayer was to bring repentance and confession to the whole nation and restore the people to a proper relationship with God.
- It might also help to remember that even though God answered Elijah's prayer immediately, he did know that right away. He had to persist in prayer and be patient.

- James closes with a quick word to people who are either leaving or being tempted to leave their faith in Jesus.
- When faced with trials, sickness and problems, lean into God. Do not abandon what you believe. And for the rest of us, go after them.
- Let what you believe determine your actions. Live out an authentic faith.
- What are your felt needs right now? Physical? Relational? Situational (\$, living situation)? Spiritual? Mental (stuck, need understanding)?
- Jesus is still healing. He wants to be your first resort, not your last, because he wants all of you.
- 1) Ask for prayer. Humble yourself.
- 2) Confess. Seek his face.
- 3) Have someone pray for you to be healed. Forgiven. To find freedom.