

9. We believe in divine healing through the atonement and prayer for the sick.

(Transcript of message preached by Pastor Rick Minett on May 8, 2005 at Grace Community Church)

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:13-15).

First of all, James says that when we are suffering, we need to come to Christ. *“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.”* Suffering represents a myriad of things: sickness, struggles, disappointment, persecution, even death, and a hundred things in-between. And what we are told in James 5 is the same thing we are told over and over again throughout scripture—we need to come to Christ whenever we suffer. That’s why Jesus compels us in Matthew 11:28 to, *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*

Secondly, James says that when we are experiencing success, we need to come to Christ. *“Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.”* Several years ago I was asked to speak to a large group of college professors in Washington D.C. about the value of religion in the workplace. I was in seminary at the time and was taking a class that dealt with the subject, and wrote a paper that my professor evidently liked. So when grant money was made available to send a graduate student to speak to these professors in our capitol, I was given the opportunity. When the meeting was over, I spent the next day sight-seeing throughout Washington D.C. and the following day at the Naval Academy in Annapolis. But while I was there I realized something; it was hard for me to enjoy myself as much as I normally would because I didn’t have anyone to share my joy. I wanted to say, *“Isn’t that wonderful? Isn’t that spectacular?”* But there was no one with me to share my enthusiasm. When something good happens, it’s only natural to want to share that with someone we love. And if that’s true on the human level, shouldn’t it be true with regards to God? That’s why James says that when we are cheerful, when we are experiencing success, we should go to God and share our joy with Him.

Thirdly, James says that when we are sick, we need to come to Christ. *“Is there anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.”* I grew up in a church where it was very common for people to be anointed with oil and prayed for when they were sick, and I’ve seen people healed and I’ve seen others who were not—at least this side of heaven. And I will be the first to admit that this subject can be very befuddling at times and that it is not nearly as simple as some “faith teachers” make it seem, but there are some things I’ve come to understand.

I’ve Come To Understand That There Are Some Things I’ll Never Understand

I believe in the Trinity, but I don’t understand it. I believe in the Virgin Birth, but I don’t understand it. I believe that God always existed, but I don’t understand it. Lack of understanding doesn’t keep me from believing. I believe lots of things not because I comprehend them intellectually, but simply because the Bible says it and that settles it for me. And the Bible clearly says in Isaiah 53 that, *“He was wounded for transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.”*

So often I feel like Job, when he answered the Lord in Job 42 and said, *“I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, ‘Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”* I’ve always loved the rendering of those three verses from the “Jerusalem Bible.” It reads, *“I know that You are powerful: what You conceive, You can perform. I am the man who obscured Your designs with my empty-headed words. I have been holding forth on matters I cannot understand, on marvels beyond me and my knowledge.”* I feel like that at times, don’t you?

I’ve been around the church for over 50 years now. I’ve attended tens of thousands of Sunday School classes, church services, revival services, and the like. I’ve studied the Bible most of my life. I’ve got an undergraduate degree from a Bible College and a Masters of Divinity Degree from a Seminary, and the one thing I am certain of after all these years of study is that the marvels of God are “beyond me and my knowledge.” One day we will be like Him and when that happens we will understand, but until that time, the Apostle Paul tells us that we *“now see in a mirror dimly”* (1 Corinthians 13:12). When it comes to the subject of healing, there are many things that are like seeing in a mirror dimly. It’s a bit foggy.

I mentioned Kathryn Kuhlman previously. For decades she witnessed the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit and literally saw the lame walk, the blind see, cancers dissolve, and a host of other miracles. Yet, when she came to the concluding years of her life, she wrote a book entitled, *“The Woman Who Believes in Miracles.”* And in it, she said: *“I have decided that God doesn’t have preferences in theology. We are the ones who try to put a fence around God, to bring Him down to our level. But it doesn’t work. God is too big for us to confine. I’ve never written a book on the how and why of divine healing—even though I’ve been besieged with requests to do so—simply because I don’t know the how and the why. You see, just about the time the book was about to be published, the Holy Spirit would do something absolutely contrary to what I said. I’m still learning the mysterious way in which God moves. I’ll tell you one thing—I’m sure God has a sense of humor! There was a day, when I was very young and knew a great deal more than I do now, that I said, ‘You must do thus and so, to be healed. There are certain conditions that have to be met.’ I thought, for example, that faith on the part of the seeker was absolutely necessary. Then one day I got the shock of my life. A man said his deaf ear had just been opened in a service, but he had no faith at all. ‘I don’t believe it,’ he said. ‘I never go to church.’ Well, there*

went my theology out the window... Take another example. Twenty years ago I believed that absolutely, come hell or high water, it was God's will for everybody, without exception, to be healed. But I've watched this thing very carefully. Now I see that we can't demand or command God to do anything. In general, I definitely believe that it is God's will to heal. But I can't say absolutely what is or is not His will in a particular case. There are some things I've learned just not to touch."

Francis MacNutt, in his classic book simply entitled, "Healing" writes, "Healing is mysterious. The best that man can do is to bow down before the mystery that is God." It was a mystery for His disciples, and I feel safe in predicting that it will be that way until we get to heaven—and then we won't care!

I've Come To Understand That Some People Will Never Understand Or Want To Understand

Years ago, I asked a pastor of a mainline denominational church if they prayed for the sick in his church and I'll never forget his response. He said, "O yes, we pray for the sick. We just don't believe anyone will be healed." There's nothing new about that kind of skepticism; that's been going on since the very birth of the church. For instance, the first physical healing that we know about after the birth of the church in Acts 2 is the healing of a lame man in Acts 3. Day after day this man was brought to the gate of the Temple that was called Beautiful, and one day Peter and James were walking by when this man asked for alms. Simon Peter said, "*Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.*" Then they lifted him up, he was healed, and he started "*walking, leaping, and praising God*" as he entered the temple with Peter and John. But when we come to chapter four of Acts, guess who shows up? The skeptics! And who are they? The preachers!

The members of the Sanhedrin were struggling with two issues here in Acts 4. One was theoretical: Was the healing real or not? And one was practical: What should they do about it? They were forced by the obvious evidence that the healing was for real, but they still ordered Peter and John to stop praying for people in the name of Christ because they didn't understand it and because they thought it would undermine their authority if miracles happened at the hands of the "uneducated and untrained."

Acts 4:15 says the religious leaders got together to discuss the problem and verses 16 and 17 tells us what they said to each other. "*What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them that from now on they speak to no man in this name.*" So the bottom line is this—the skeptics have always been with us, but our response must be like that of Peter and John when they told the members of the Sanhedrin in Acts 3:20, "*For we cannot but speak the thing which we have seen and heard.*"

I've Come To Understand That Healing Is In "The Name" And Not The "Big Names"

It never ceases to amaze me the amount of people who will never go to a local church and ask brothers and sisters in the Lord to pray the prayer of faith over them and yet they will travel half-way across the globe to sit in the service of a particular evangelist. I've always been amazed by that because the power to heal isn't in this person or that person, the power to heal is in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

When Jesus walked on planet earth, did He limit healing manifestations merely to Himself? No! Did he limit healing manifestations to the twelve disciples? No! He sent out at least seventy others that we know of and told them in Luke 10:9 to "*heal the sick there and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'*" There's a young man in Acts 6 named Stephen who wasn't a great evangelist or even a preacher. He was a deacon appointed by the preachers to help distribute food to needy people in the church, but Acts 6:8 says, "*And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.*" And the reason that happened is because the key isn't the "big names" but "the name." James 5:14 says, "*Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.*" The power isn't in the elders or the oil or even the prayers—the power is in the name of the Lord!

You are probably familiar with the Great Commission when Jesus told us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). And He said signs will follow those who walk in obedience to His commission. In verses 17 and 18, Jesus said that "*they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick and they will recover.*" And why is that? Is it because we are so powerful, so wonderful, or so spiritual? No! Jesus said, "*In My name they will cast out demons...*"

Do you remember what Peter and John said to the lame man at the Gate Beautiful? Did they say, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give to you: Rise up and walk"? No! They said, "*Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.*" And remember what the members of the Sanhedrin forbid them of doing? Was it preaching? No! It was preaching in the name of Jesus. They were told to speak to no man "in this name." Even these religious imposters realized the power didn't come from Peter and John—it came from the name!

Years before the birth of the Messiah in a manger in Bethlehem, the Old Testament prophet proclaimed that this name would be so special that it would be the composite of His many attributes. Isaiah said that His name would be "wonderful"—supernatural and incredible things would happen through this name. His name would be "counselor"—He would be the most amazing guiding force the world has ever seen. His name would be "mighty God"—He would be strong, invincible, powerful, and He would conquer His enemies. Isaiah said His name would be "everlasting Father"—He always has been and always will be, and He will be our Father—ever loving, supporting, sustaining, and comforting. And the prophet concluded by saying His name would be "prince of peace"—through Him, man will find peace with God. All that gives us just a hint into the magnitude of His name!

A country song came out in the 70s about a boy named Billy Joe who was always told to walk away from a fight, and that made it easy for the other boys to always pick on him. And there were three boys, let's just call them the Smith boys, who always gave him a rough time. Bobbie, Tommy, and Kenny Smith would hit him and accost him every chance they had and Billy Joe would

never do a thing to retaliate. Before long everyone in the county made fun of both Billy Joe and his name, and his name became synonymous with being a coward. They called him “the coward of the county.”

But the song doesn’t end there. The song goes on to tell the story that one night the three Smith boys raped Billy Joe’s wife and when Billy Joe found out about it he made his way down to the nastiest part of town and walked into a bar. The Smith boys were there and when they saw Billy Joe walk in—the coward of the county—they laughed. And when they walked toward him, he headed for the door just as they expected him to do. But he didn’t walk out. Instead, he reached up and took the keys off the wall, locked the door and put the keys in his pocket. Then he looked them straight in the eyes, called them by name, and said; “If anybody is going to get out of here tonight, they’ve got to get past Billy Joe.” Within seconds, the dust began to rise and there was a commotion like never seen before in that part of the country. And when it was all over, there was only one man standing—Billy Joe. And the song says that from that time forward everyone had great respect for the name Billy Joe!

The Bible tells a similar story. The Bible says that there was a man who was known as the coward of the kingdom. Everybody laughed at Him. They abused Him, called Him names and even spit on Him. They would mock Him and says things such as, “He’s saved others but He can’t save Himself. He’s nothing; this Jesus.” They were so unafraid of Him that they eventually nailed Him to a cross and killed Him.

But the story doesn’t end there. The Bible goes on to say that Jesus left the cross and went down to the nastiest part of planet earth, a place called hell; and when He walked in the devil and his demons laughed. “Look who’s showed up, the coward of the kingdom!” And when He headed for the door they laughed even more, until He reached up and took the keys and you know what He did. He locked the door! And when He locked the door, He essentially said, “Okay—hell, death, and the grave—come on! Because from this moment forward anybody who gets past this door has got to get past Me!” And the dust started flying, and when the commotion was all over only One man was left standing and His name was Jesus! The Bible says that Jesus Christ overcame hell, death, and the grave that day; and the book of Colossians says that Jesus so disarmed Satan and his demonic host that He made a public spectacle out of them! And from that moment on, let me assure you that Satan and every demon of hell has never laughed again at the name of Jesus. They respect it—because He did battle with them, won the fight and rose victorious! That is why we sing, “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name!” He is worthy of our praise, whether or not He answers our prayers the way that we think He should. He is worthy because of His name!

Three Hebrew young men named Shadrach, Meshack and Abed-Nego teach us a valuable lesson about healing. King Nebuchadnezzar had sent out a decree throughout Babylon that everyone was to bow and worship the golden image that he had erected. But these young men refused to worship anyone or anything but God and God alone. And when the king brought them in and gave them the choice to either bow down or be thrown into a fiery furnace, I love how they responded. They said, “*O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O King. But if not, let it be known to you, O King, we will not bow down and serve your gods or worship the golden image you have set up.*” Essentially they were saying, “God is able to deliver us and we believe that He will. But even if He doesn’t do it the way we think He will or should, we will still worship Him and Him alone!” That is the kind of attitude that all of us should have. “I know God has the power to heal and I believe that He will. But even if it doesn’t happen the way I expect, I will never cease worshipping Him.”

Even though there are many things I do not understand about healing, I’m going to keep on praying for the sick every time the opportunity is presented and I’m going to pray aggressively, fervently, and submissively. Aggressively...because the Bible says that God is “*able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us...*” (Ephesians 3:20). Fervently...because the Bible says that “*the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*” (James 5:16). And I’m going to pray “submissively” because God knows everything and I don’t; and His perfect will may be different than mine. My responsibility is to do my best to be conducive to the blowing of the wind of His Spirit in my life and in our church.

Missionary Hudson Taylor, when he first went to China, made the voyage on a sailing ship and somewhere along the journey there was an urgent knock on his stateroom door. He opened it and there stood the captain of the ship. “Mr. Taylor,” he said, “We have no wind. We are drifting toward an island where the people are heathen and I fear they are cannibals.” Taylor said, “What can I do?” The captain replied, “I understand that you believe in God. I want you to pray for wind.” “All right,” the missionary said, “But you must set the sail.” That agitated the captain. “Sir,” he said, “That’s ridiculous! There’s not even the slightest breeze. My men will think I’m crazy.” But Taylor was insistent and the captain finally agreed. Within 45 minutes the captain returned and found the missionary still on his knees. He said, “Mr. Taylor, you can stop praying now. We’ve got more wind than we know what to do with!”

The Holy Spirit is the wind of God and He brings healing to the human mind, soul, spirit, and body; and though we can’t predict how and where He is going to blow, our responsibility is to set our sails by faith and say, “Spirit, blow through me.”