**Bible Study Sept.28th 2023 – The Gifts of the Holy Spirit part 11 – gifts of healing continued**

Read **1 Cor. 12.4-11**

We started to look two weeks ago at gifts of healing. Just to recap, we saw that even though there are many miracles recorded in the Old Testament there are very few miracles of healing, in fact there are more cases of people being afflicted with sickness by God than there are of God healing people. This makes the healing ministry of Jesus even more remarkable because during His three years of ministry He healed thousands of people. Not only was healing an important part of Jesus’ ministry but when He sent out the disciples it was not only to preach but to “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons” (Matthew 10.8.) Gifts of healing were not just for Bible times but for today and we concluded last time with two examples of people in more recent times whose ministry was characterised by miraculous healings: Smith Wigglesworth, a plumber from Bradford whose healing ministry included deafness, blindness, paralysis and even raising the dead. And John told us about Douglas Scott who went to France and God worked miraculously through him. In spite of him not being very good at speaking the French language, many people were healed including deafness, paralysis and cancer.

This week we are going to look further at the spiritual gift referred to as gifts of healing. The first thing to notice is that Paul does not say “the gift of healing” but “gifts of healing” (plural). This would suggest that each time someone is healed it is a gift. It is not that someone has “the gift of healing” and can heal people at will but the Holy Spirit gives gifts “as He wills” (1 Corinthians 12.11) so it is important to be led by the Spirit and to act in faith when the Holy Spirit inspires us.

When we looked at the gifts of tongues, interpretation and prophecy in I Corinthians Ch.14 the context was worship in the local church and their primary use was for edification of other believers. However, gifts of healing, whilst sometimes being needed among believers, are also of great importance in evangelism. In Mark 16.15-20 Jesus commanded His disciples to go and preach the Gospel and He promises various signs including “they will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover”. **Hebrews 2.4** also speaks about God bearing witness to those who preached salvation with signs, wonders, various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit. We are going to look next week at how this gift may be used for the benefit of believers who are sick but this week we will concentrate on how gifts of healing can be a sign to confirm the preaching of the Gospel.

**Acts 1.1** refers to Luke’s Gospel as “all that Jesus began to do and teach” and the implication is that Jesus’ work would be continued through the “acts” of His Apostles. Healing miracles were a distinctive part of what Jesus did and so as you would expect this healing ministry was continued by His Apostles. In **Acts 3.1-10** Peter heals a man who was lame from birth and had to be carried to the gate of the temple to beg. This man asks Peter and John for money, he is not asking to be healed and there is no mention of him having faith.

Often in the Gospels people came to Jesus because they had faith that He would heal them and Jesus commented on the faith of some of the people that He healed e.g. the woman with the issue of blood – “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease.” (Mark 5.34); and Bartimaeus – “Go your way, your faith has made you well” (Mark 10.52). On other occasions Jesus commented the faith of the person asking for healing on another person’s behalf e.g. the Roman centurion’s servant – “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” (Luke 7.9); the Canaanite woman with a demon possessed daughter – “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” (Matthew 15.28) and when four people lowered their paralysed friend through the roof of the house “Jesus saw their faith” (Mark 2.5).

However, with the crippled man at the Beautiful Gate there is no mention of either him or his friends or relatives having faith – it was Peter who had faith that this man would be healed. Peter didn’t ask the man if he believed in Jesus, He didn’t lead him in the sinner’s prayer first before praying for healing; in fact, he didn’t pray for the man – he just took him by the hand and raised him up and “immediately his feet and ankles were made strong” (v7). He leapt to his feet and went into the temple walking and leaping and praising God! When the people saw this they were “filled with wonder and amazement” (v10). Hebrews 2.4 speaks about God bearing witness “with signs, wonders various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit”. “Wonders” are miracles that fill people with wonder. This amazing miracle of healing caused the people to gather round and gave Peter an opportunity to preach to them about Jesus. The religious authorities arrested them because they were preaching about Jesus and the resurrection but **Acts 4.4** tells us that “many of those who heard the word believed”.

After Peter and John had been released they went to their friends and they prayed together for boldness and that God would stretch out His hand to heal and that signs and wonders would be done in the name of Jesus (**Acts 4.29-30**). God answered their prayer immediately by shaking the building and filling them with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the word of God with boldness (**v31**). The book of Acts tells us of how God continued to answer their prayer by confirming their words with signs and wonders.

**Acts 6.8** tells us that Stephen did great signs and wonders. False charges were brought against him and he was brought before the Sanhedrin and to cut a long story short he became the first Christian martyr. But on the majority of occasions when people witnessed signs and wonders it resulted in them having faith in Jesus. **Acts 8.5-8** tells us about Philip the evangelist whose preaching in Samaria had great effect because it was confirmed by signs. **Acts 9.32-35** tells us that many people in Lydda and Sharon “turned to the Lord” as a result of Peter healing Aeneas who had been paralysed for eight years. **Acts 9.36- 42** Peter was at Joppa and he raised a woman from the dead and as a result “many believed in the Lord” (**v42**). This particular miracle must have brought back memories to Peter of Jairus’ daughter who Jesus raised from the dead. The original Aramaic words of Jesus are preserved in **Mark 5.41** “Talitha cumi” (which means little girl, I say to you arise). I’m sure that when Peter said “Tabitha, rise” or “Tabitha cumi” as he would have said in Aramaic, the memories must have flooded back to him.

The Apostle Paul’s ministry was also accompanied by miraculous signs and wonders. He refers to these in his epistles (**Romans 15.18-19 & 2 Corinthians 12.12**) and also there are accounts of some of these miracles in the book of Acts. In **Acts 14.8-18** Paul heals a man who had been crippled from birth and never walked. The initial response of the crowd was to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods but it gave them the opportunity to explain the Gospel to them. This was followed with the opposite response from some Jews from Antioch and Iconium who persuaded the people to stone Paul. He was dragged out of the city and left for dead but when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up. He went back into the city and preached the Gospel and made many disciples (**Acts 14.19-21**).

One of the things that characterised these signs and wonders is that they were miraculous healings which took place instantly. Often when we pray for people to be healed God answers our prayers gradually over a period of time. Sometimes, as with my own Mum’s healing, we may be aware of God intervening with His healing power but the skills of medical professionals were also part of the healing. As believers we give glory to God for healings whether as a result of prayer or medical help and whether they are instant or take place over a period of time. However, for unbelievers to become believers it sometimes takes instantaneous miraculous signs and wonders.

Signs and wonders have also been a vital part of spreading the Gospel for missionaries in more recent history. Some examples:

Willie Burton and Jimmy Salter were missionaries to the Congo and established the Congo Evangelistic Mission (now CAM) in 1915. When taking the Gospel to some “wild and lawless folk” at Ngoimani and Lubinda, Willie Burton prayed for chief Lubinda’s withered hand which was restored instantaneously. Jimmy Salter spent two weeks in follow up and it led to the opening of the second Mission Station. (Into Africa p.54).

Fred Ramsbottom was another missionary who went to Congo in 1934 and saw some amazing miracles. (Bob and Mary Shaw knew him personally because when Fred and his wife Isabel retired they went to the church that Bob was Pastoring in Colne). In his book “African Plenty”, he tells the story of a man raised from the dead in a village called Koni. This village had been openly hostile to the Gospel but after this amazing miracle many of the villagers were converted instantly (African Plenty p.82-83)

Another example of healing accompanying the preaching of the Gospel is Brother Yun, a Chinese Christian, who whilst in prison for preaching the Gospel “laid hands” other prisoners who were sick by massaging them. As he massaged them he prayed for them and told them the Gospel and many were healed and received the Lord as their Saviour (The Heavenly man p.201-202).

Next week we’ll continue to look at gifts of healing but focusing on healing for God’s people.