The Gifts of the Spirit part 12 – Gifts of healing continued – healing for God’s people.

Last week we looked at gifts of healing in the context of evangelism and how miraculous healings, sometimes referred to as signs and wonders, can open up new areas to the Gospel and result in many people coming to faith. When signs and wonders are performed it is very often someone who is not a Christian who gets healed. This week we are going to look at what the Bible says about healing for God’s people.

Before talking about healing I would like us first of all to think about health. When some people become Christians they have an amazing and very noticeable transformation that takes place in their lives and it is obvious to everyone that they have become a new creation. However, for other people their story may be that they grew up a Christian family, enjoyed going to church as a child, never got drunk, never took drugs, never did anything immoral and never committed a crime. But at some point they realised that they needed Jesus to forgive them of their sins and they put their faith in Him. Whatever type of testimony we have, we all need Jesus to be our Saviour.

In a similar way, one person may have several serious illnesses and need the Lord to heal them of their afflictions, whereas another person may enjoy the blessing of good health but we all need the Lord to be our Healer

In **Exodus 15.26** God says “I am the Lord, your Healer”. The first part of this verse speaks about God NOT putting on them the diseases which He put on Egypt. Similarly, in **Deut. 7.15** God promises “And the Lord will take away from you all sickness; and none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which you knew, will He inflict upon you, but He will lay them upon all who hate you.” These promises are not so much to do with healing of individuals as health for the community of God’s people.
In **Deut. Ch. 28** God promised to bless His people if they obeyed His commandments (Deut. 28.1-14) but if they disobeyed Him there would be curses which would include: pestilence (v21), consumption, fever, inflammation (v22), the boils of Egypt, ulcers, scurvy and the itch (v27), madness, blindness, confusion of mind (v28), grievous boils of which you cannot be healed (v35), extraordinary afflictions and sicknesses grievous and lasting (v59), all the diseases of Egypt (v60) every sickness and every affliction which is not recorded in the book of the law (v61). So, God’s promise to them was that if they obeyed Him, rather than suffering from these various afflictions they would have good health.

Many of the laws in the book of Leviticus were to do with animals which were either clean or unclean (i.e. animals which they could eat and those which they couldn’t) and also personal hygiene and sanitation. These laws were very practical and would have prevented many diseases.

We saw last week that there were very few instances in the Old Testament of someone being healed but God’s promise was that if His people obeyed Him and lived according to His laws, they would enjoy good health. This did not mean that none of them ever got sick, for example, Elisha fell sick with an illness and died (**2 Kings 13.14**); but as a community of God’s people God gave them rules to live by that were a healthy lifestyle and He promised to bless them with health.

For us as Christians, God wants us to be healthy both spiritually and physically and the two are very strongly connected. In **3 John 1.2** John says to Gaius NKJV “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers”. When someone’s soul is prospering and they are spiritually healthy they will be physically more healthy.
For example, there have been many people who have become more healthy after becoming Christians because in their old life they were heavy drinkers but after coming to the Lord they changed their lifestyle. **Ephesians 5.18** tells us not to get drunk with wine but to be filled with the Spirit. There are many illnesses that can be caused by drinking too much alcohol such as: liver diseases, high blood pressure that can result in heart disease or a stroke, pancreatitis, depression, increased likelihood of getting cancer and a suppression of the immune system making you more susceptible to infections.
On the other hand, if someone is filled with the Spirit they will feel more joyful. **Ephesians 5.19-20** tells us that they will be singing and making melody to the Lord and they will be thankful. **Romans 8.6** tells us that “to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

Another example is the many health problems that can be caused by stress and anxiety such as: depression, high blood pressure, heart disease, irritable bowel syndrome, muscle tension, headaches, sleep disorders and some skin conditions such as psoriasis and eczema that can worsen with stress. When someone becomes a Christian and knows God as their Heavenly Father, they learn to trust him and let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day (Mat. 6.34). When we bring our anxieties to the Lord He gives us His peace (**Phil 4.6-7**). So, being spiritually healthy can improve our physical health and prevent us from getting certain illnesses.

Another example is the many health problems that can be caused by holding onto anger or unforgiveness, which again can lead not only to a variety of mental health issues but also a weakened immune system and a greater risk of a stroke or heart attack. When someone experiences God’s forgiveness and they in turn learn to forgive others this can prevent them from getting these health problems.

Of course, none of us are completely immune from illnesses and, like Elisha, (unless the Lord returns first) we will probably all one day fall sick with the illness of which we will die. However, if we are spiritually healthy, the Lord, Who is our Healer, will bless us with good health in this life.

When it comes to a believer who is sick and in need of healing, there is one main passage in the New Testament which speaks about this – **James 5.10-16**.
v 13 says “Is any one among you suffering? Let him pray.” The Greek word here is kakopatheo which literally means to “to suffer evil or to suffer something which is bad”. The same word is used in v10 concerning the suffering of the prophets. V 11 also refers to the suffering of Job which as well as attacks from enemies and disasters, also included being afflicted with “loathsome sores” all over his body (Job 2.7). There are some types of suffering for which we need to pray for patient endurance.

V14 says “is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders…”
What James seems to be speaking about here is a situation where someone is so seriously ill that they cannot pray for themselves and so they are to call for the elders. With many minor illnesses there is no reason why someone can’t pray for themselves or ask another believer to pray with them but sometimes someone is too ill to attend church and this seems to be what James is describing.
v14 – he “calls for” the elders suggests that he is too ill to go to church
v14 - they “pray over him” – i.e. he is lying in bed and they are standing praying over him.
v15 – “the Lord will raise him up” again suggests that he is lying down.

V14 – one of the instructions for the elders is to anoint with oil. This is also referred to in Mark 6.13 and is a symbol of the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

V15 says that “the prayer of faith will save the sick man”. The Greek word used here is “sozo” which can be translated “save”, as in saving someone from their sins (Matthew 1.21), but was often also used to refer to someone being healed (e.g. Mark 5.23, 28 & 34 – Jairus’ daughter and the woman with the issue of blood).

V15-16 also refers to confessing sins and being forgiven. The Bible is clear that there are occasions when sickness can be a result of someone’s sin. We have already looked at examples in the Old Testament when God actually afflicted people with a sickness because of their sin. In the New Testament we have the examples of the paralysed man to whom Jesus said, “My son, your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2.5) and the crippled man that Jesus healed at the pool of Bethesda and afterwards told him “See you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you.” (John 5.14) sadly, there were also people in the Church at Corinth who were sick and some had died because they had been partaking of the Lord’s supper in an unworthy manner ( 1 Cor. 11.27-32).
On the other hand, the Bible is clear that not all sickness is a result of someone’s sin. For example, Job (Job 1.1) and the man born blind (John 9.1-3).

Paul told the Corinthians concerning the Lord’s supper, “Let a man examine himself” (1 Cor. 11.28) and whenever you are ill it is also good to examine your heart and confess any sin and receive forgiveness. However, this must be balanced with the fact that we are living in a fallen world and sometimes even the best of us get sick. When that happens the last thing you need is someone trying to take you on a guilt trip!

The Apostle Paul was greatly used by God in healing the sick and yet there are three examples of his co-workers who got sick:
Epaphroditus – **Philippians 2.25-30** – Paul highly commends him and there is no suggestion that his illness is the result of sin in his life, it was possibly more to do with the zeal with which he served the Lord. Thankfully God in His mercy healed Epaphroditus.
Trophimus – **2 Timothy 4.20** the brief statement “Trophimus I left ill at Miletus” leaves us with some unanswered questions: Did Paul pray for Him without him being healed? Did Trophimus eventually recover?
What we do know is that Trophimus was a co-worker with Paul (Acts 20.4, 21.29) and so, a committed Christian, and yet he became ill.

Timothy – **1 Timothy 5.23** – on this occasion Paul suggests a medical solution to Timothy’s frequent ailments.
What is clear is that even though God did great signs and wonders through Paul, he could not just heal people at will but as we said last week, the Holy spirit gives gifts of healing (and other gifts) as He wills.

When we pray for people to be healed we should do so with faith and expect the Lord to heal (**James 1.6-8; 5.15**) but sometimes people may get healed gradually, sometimes their healing may be the ultimate healing for Christians which is the redemption of our bodies. When the Lord returns our bodies will be changed and this will be complete healing (**Phil. 3.20-21; 1 Cor. 15.51-55**).

There are many unanswered questions regarding healing, the biggest of all being, why do some people get healed and not others? Smith Wigglesworth (known as the Apostle of Faith) suffered for three years with gall stones but while he was sick he saw many miraculous healings on others. (Reminiscences of Smith Wigglesworth p.23). Willie Burton had trouble with his teeth and trusted God for healing and a new set grew! (Into Africa p.29) However, he was prepared to take medicine when it was available. When entering an area where there was malaria James Salter chose to trust God whereas Willie Burton took Quinine to protect him from malaria so that others would not be burdened nursing him. (Into Africa p39-40). Both of them had many serious attacks of malaria and both survived.