

“Survey Said: Healing”

Jer. 17:14; James 5:14-15; Mark 10:46-52

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As you all well know, I have a ‘twisted’ habit of using obscure, cleverly-worded sermon titles... ones that like to keep you guessing as to just where the quirky preacher man just might be going in his message. (Witness last week’s ‘pivotal’ title...) NOT SO with this week. “Healing.” Pretty straightforward. And the fact that it made the ‘Survey Said’ list would probably come as no surprise either. In our weekly ... and daily... time of intercessory prayer, requests for God’s **healing** would be far-and-away the #1 topic. Which indicates to me that we, as a general rule (at least, in THIS room) **believe** that God has the power of healing in His ‘wheelhouse.’ That would certainly sound to be true for the prophet Jeremiah, whom we just heard:

***“Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved;
for you are my praise.” (Jeremiah 17:14)***

These words from the prophet Jeremiah don’t leave much ‘wriggle room’ as to the **confidence** that the prophet has in God’s ability to heal. The same could be said for good ol’ ‘Blind Bartimaeus,’ who, when he heard that this ‘miracle man’ Jesus was nearby, *“began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! (Mark 10:47)* And when he was told to be quiet, it just made him shout even louder. WHY? Because he **believed** in the ability of Jesus, God’s Son, to HEAL him.

We share with the ancient prophet and the not-quite-so-ancient blind beggar that God in truth has the power to bring healing. BUT, we also know that God does not always choose to do so. Everyone of us knows of those for whom we have prayed that have not been cured of their illness, their disease. **Why not?**

The answer is quite simple: I ... DON’T ... KNOW. There are certain answers to difficult questions that are WAY ‘above my pay grade.’ I cannot say why it is that God heals one person and not another. What I DO know, at least in my heart, is that no matter the outcome that God has decreed, we must STILL continue to PRAY! Will our prayers CHANGE that outcome? Another question for a power much higher than mine. Tho there ARE instances in Scripture where God is believed to have ‘changed His mind.’ That same Word of God that assures us that

“the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.” In spite of our waywardness, yes, even you and I can be ‘righteous’....

But as to the importance of **continuing** to lift up our prayers to God, I would liken it to an old joke about a couple in marriage counseling. The husband was asked when the last time he told his wife that he loved her. He replied, ‘Well, I told her I loved her at the altar 20 years ago when we married, and nothing has changed...’ And how well do you think THAT worked...? Just like we need to tell our earthly loved ones how much we care about them on a DAILY basis, so too should we express our love to GOD *‘everyday.’* We express our love by ‘communicating’... by TALKING. Our ‘conversation’ with God takes many forms: Remember ‘ACTS?’ **Adoration** and praise. **Confession** of our wrongs. Saying ‘**thanks**’ for all we’ve been given. ‘**Supplication**,’ or more simply ‘requests.’ Interceding for others... for, among other things, **HEALING**. And if we are not willing to **articulate** our prayers... to ‘let our requests be known to God’... we must ask ourselves, ‘Do I REALLY ‘believe?’

Arguably, I would say that this issue of ‘healing’ can have some of the greatest bearings on one’s FAITH. **Good OR bad**. That most people, whether they admit it or not, want to believe in a ‘higher power’ that can help them in times of need. If their prayers... their ‘request,’ their ‘conversation’... with that Power is answered, their faith is built up. If NOT, then their faith takes a hit. There are countless numbers of people who have lost faith in God because their heartfelt, sincere prayers for healing for a loved one were NOT answered. WHY should they believe in a ‘loving God’ who would not listen to their pleas, but instead taking their beloved from them?

As we look at these two Scriptures, let us consider them through the lens of such doubt. How we are to approach God with our **prayers for healing**, and how to encourage others in their own prayers... no matter where their faith may stand. And in so doing, may our own understanding of what ‘faith’ and ‘healing’ really mean also be strengthened... **[PRAYER]**

We start with this blind man named ‘**Bartimaeus**.’ What is interesting right off the bat is that this is not *really* his name. For that first syllable, ‘Bar,’ means ‘son’ in Hebrew. So he is not being addressed by his given name, but as the ‘Son of Timaeus.’ Not his own identity, but that of his father. Indicative of his **lack of personal value** in the **eyes** of his **peers**. A blind beggar.

Pretty **worthless**. Much the way that many in our own culture can feel. A homeless 'street person.' A poor single mother. Or even one who is an 'upstanding citizen,' but has a disease, a condition that makes them feel 'less' of a person. Of less value. Perhaps even 'worthless.'

But it's obvious, however, that 'Timaeus' son' is NOT wallowing in self-pity or low self-esteem. For when he hears that 'Jesus is in the house,' he has the boldness to call out to the 'Man from Galilee.' And even when **"many sternly ordered him to be quiet... he cried out even more loudly."** (Mark 10:48) This lowly man of the street had heard enough about Jesus, **by word of mouth**, that he TRUSTED in His ability to work miracles. Bartimaeus BELIEVED.

And Jesus took note. We read that **"Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.'"** (Mark 10:49) Have you ever considered that Jesus NEVER said 'I don't have time' to someone who approached him? Jesus never replied, 'Go away kid, you bother me'? Jesus never said, 'Please talk to one of my associate disciples.' He always took time from his mission to give that most precious gift: **time**. As Greg Murtha, author of the book our (LC) men's group is discussing, Out of the Blue, wrote, **"Maybe embracing interruptions WAS Jesus' mission."** Even though he was on a tight timetable, a 'limited run' of 3 short years on this earth, **Jesus was never too busy to stop and care for the hurting**. Particularly when their faith caused them to reach out to the Savior for help. How about US? How many times to WE say, either aloud or in silence, I'm just too busy to deal with this 'interruption.' Perhaps Jesus' 'availability' to others is something WE should take to heart in the 'busy-ness' of our day...

Further, Bartimaeus' belief, his **faith**, in Christ was not merely a mental exercise that he held close to his heart. He **articulated** that faith. In Paul's words, he **"let his requests be known to God."** More specifically, to God the Son. Bartimaeus said to Jesus, **"My teacher, let me see again."** (Mark 10:52) This is also translated, **"Let me receive, regain, my sight."** And for the faith that he demonstrated, Jesus complied. **"Immediately he regained his sight."** For his trust in God's Son, Bartimaeus was granted his request. In James' words, **"The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up."** (Jas 5:15)

Or, as Jesus' said: **"Go; your faith has made you well."** (Mark 10:52)

BUT... what if the blind man's sight had NOT been restored? Could Jesus' still have made that statement that 'your faith has made you whole?' I would say YES! That even if his

physical sight had not been restored, his spiritual 'vision' would still be '20/20.' He still would have been forever moved by the fact that the Son of God took time to stop and engage someone of such 'low estate'... someone as small in the world's eyes as a blind beggar. Bartimaeus knew of his worth in GOD's eyes... and could've sung the words of the song that comes from Scripture, *"His eyes are on the sparrow, and I know He watches me."*

YES, we are called to lift up to God our prayers for healing, and trust in God's ability to do so. That we are to trust in Jesus' words, found in the next chapter of Mark: ***"So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."*** (Mark 11:24) But that our being made 'whole' has as much to do with our *spiritual* bodies as it does for our *physical* ones. That our faith in God must go deeper than whether or not the answers to our prayers come out the way we want. Even for something as worthy as HEALING. **And that if our prayers, healing or otherwise, are not answered, it is not necessarily a reflection on our lack of faith!** But rather, just another opportunity for us to GROW in our faith... that even in the depths of our despair, our God will still be there... in the same way that Jesus stopped for a blind beggar on the side of the road...

There's a song by a contemporary Christian singer named Bart Millard that I think well expresses how we are to respond to unanswered prayer. (He wrote the song "I Can Only Imagine", about which a movie was made). Here's a few of the lyrics:

"They say it only takes a little faith
To move a mountain
Well good thing A little faith is all I have right now
But God when You choose To leave mountains unmovable
Oh give me the strength to be able to sing **It is well with my soul**

I know the sorrow and I know the hurt
Would all go away
if You just say the word; But **even if You don't My hope is You alone**"

As strong as we seek to be in our Christian faith, there are times when we will be weak. That in the words of the song, "A little faith is all I have." As Christ followers, we should remember some words that came JUST before today's healing story: ***"They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them... and those who followed were afraid."*** (Mk 10:32) We too can be 'afraid.' We too know sorrow and hurt... and YET, can

believe that it will all go away if God would just 'say the word.' But we must continue to ask for the strength to say, 'even if You don't My hope is You alone.' That as we pray for healing of a **physical** nature, what is just as important is that we pray for **spiritual** wholeness.

As we pray for others to experience healing of **body**, let us also lift up prayers of healing for **mind** and **soul**... for them, and their loved ones. Let us be conscious of how we are to live by Jesus' example to take time to STOP and minister to others... the '**mission of interruptions.**' As we make the effort to PRAY for the healing of others... wholeness in mind, body, and spirit... we help them to 'regain their sight.' We help open their eyes to a 'vision' of God's love for them, as demonstrated by US. Just as that blind man HEARD, and BELIEVED through the witness of others, so too can those 'blind' to God's love for them HEAR and BELIEVE because of OUR witness. As we, the 'body of Christ,' minister to the need for healing in other 'bodies,' we are a tangible, living, breathing expression of those classic words of the hymn: '**It is well with my soul.**' And **THAT, my brothers and sisters, is the most lasting 'healing' of all...**

CALL TO PRAYER: Relative to the subject of healing, one of our Presbyterian hymns is "O Christ the Healer." First verse goes like this:

O Christ, the healer, we have come to pray for health, to plead for friends.

How can we fail to be restored, when reached by love that never ends?

Just as we believe in the unconditional, unending LOVE of God in Christ,
So too do we hold on to the belief in God's limitless power to bring **healing**.
Just as God's love for us is **unending**, so too should ours be for one another...

CHARGE: "Grant that **we all made one in faith** In **Your community** may **find**
The **wholeness** that enriching us **Shall reach** the **whole** of **humankind**"

(*"O Christ, the Healer,"* Fred Pratt Green, 1969)