

## 2. CHARISMATIC QUESTIONS ANSWERED:-

### (B). DOES THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM INCLUDE HEALING FOR TODAY?

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**A**pparently there are 366 times throughout the Bible where we are told not to fear, not to be afraid --- that's one promise for every day of the year, with allowance for a leap year! God does not want us to be gripped by a **spirit of fear** and must really want us to have a **sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7)**. But did you also know that God has given us words for health and for healing in every book of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation?

That's right, from beginning to end He assures us He is **the LORD our Healer (Ex. 15: 26)**, that He **heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds (Ps. 147:3)**, that if we **attend to His words and incline our ears to His sayings** we will find **life and health to all our body (Prov. 4:20-22)**, that He is our Shepherd who **restores our soul**, that if we continue to trust Him, praise Him, fellowship with Him, give justice and help to the poor and needy, that we shall enjoy sweet restorative sleep at night and His peace and joy will be our strength all the days of our lives **(Ps. 23; Is. 57: 18-19)**.

Sickness never was part of God's original plan for us. And His word assures us that at the very end, when the Kingdom has finally arrived, the peoples of the earth will enjoy perfect health in a pristinely regenerated environment **(Rev. 22:1f)**.

That's the plan our Lord Jesus came announcing and fulfilling by his words and his works. He commissioned his followers, **"Heal the sick and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you" (Lk 10: 9)**. <sup>1</sup> His life, words, atoning death and mighty resurrection have guaranteed God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven.

In our first article we saw that the apostles, the Seventy (to whom the above verse was specifically addressed), others such as Philip, and indeed the testimony of the early Christian Church indicates they all took Jesus seriously at this point.

It was their joy as they announced the Good News of the Kingdom of God in the Name of Jesus **(Acts 8:12)** to know that, as **they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed (Mark 16: 20)**. <sup>2</sup> For them, as for Jesus, healings, whether physical, mental or "spiritual", were signs that the future Kingdom of God was already breaking into the now.

As **Jim Glennon** states,

It is obvious that our Lord did not look upon the healing ministry as being unique to himself because he committed the same ministry to his followers. His instruction in and promise of this are found no less than five times in the gospels. <sup>3 4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Though spoken to the Seventy for a particular historical occasion, this verse was typical of his unchanging foundational mission for the apostles --- and as I will show in the remainder of this article, was also given to his church for all generations.

<sup>2</sup> It will not do to summarily dismiss this verse as a later addendum (which in all likelihood it is BTW!) because history proved this is what did happen anyway. **Mark 16:9-20** is still a very early statement reflecting the practice and expectations of Jesus' closest and earliest followers; just read the book of Acts for verification!

<sup>3</sup> **Matt. 10:7-8; Mk. 6:7; 16: 17-18; Lk. 9: 1-2; 10: 8-9.**

<sup>4</sup> Jim Glennon, *Your Healing is Within You: A Pastoral and Scriptural Presentation of the Healing Ministry of the Church*, Hodder & Stroughton, 1978, p144 ( when I was a young Bible College student I had the privilege of meeting *Canon* Jim Glennon who was "a big gun" [pun intended] serving in a nationally acclaimed healing ministry at St Andrews

## BUT WEREN'T THE APOSTLES GIVEN A UNIQUE CALL?

Those who suggest the preaching of the Gospel does not include healing for today, imply that the commission which Jesus gave to the apostles and first Christians has somehow changed. Now, in a real sense we must recognise the foundational office of apostleship as being unique and carrying a superabundant anointing appropriate to that office.

The apostle Paul talks about **signs and wonders and mighty works of an apostle** to indicate the apostles enjoyed a uniquely foundational and beneficial ministry (2 Cor. 12: 12). They certainly were appointed by our Lord to be the **first**, and therefore, non-repeatable primary office for the church (1 Cor. 12:28).

Their institutional status cannot be repeated today.<sup>5</sup> After all, the Book of Revelation assures us --- metaphorically speaking --- that the foundations of the walls of the future New Jerusalem have the names of the twelve apostles written on them (Rev. 21: 14). Christ of course, is **the Chief Cornerstone** of the entire edifice.

Evidently, the scope and sheer quantity of the signs and wonders that followed the apostolic ministries was unique. But, in case we run away with the wrong impression, it's important to observe they always denied that such power was their own, as something innately belonging to them (e.g. Acts 3: 12; 14: 8f). They always attributed the miracles that followed their preaching to the power of their risen Lord..

Note the congregational prayer after Peter & John had been flogged and threatened;

**And now LORD, look at their threats, and grant your servants to speak Your word with all boldness, while You stretch out Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus (Acts 4: 29-30).**

Under threat from the authorities to shut down the Gospel project, the whole church in Jerusalem prayed for holy boldness to continue witnessing in obedience to the commission Jesus had bequeathed them. It was expected that God would back the Church up by stretching out His hand **to heal** and that **signs and wonders** would be **performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus**.

*The narrative of the Book of Acts shows us the Church's doctrine in practice.* We have no other historical template to follow. For the record, in the Acts there are nine cases of individual healings and, in addition there are seven other occasions of multiple crowd healings.<sup>6</sup>

So why do we have the idea that the ubiquitous healing ministry of the early church's evangelism is not to be our own blueprint --- *our* narrative --- even granted it's not on the scope and scale of the apostles?

## DISPENSATIONAL DOUBTS

There is this school of thought that says, "But healing is not for today, because Jesus' miracles were only for Israel. The healing part of the Gospel commission was limited to the apostles and to that first generation of Christians --- just to get the church off the ground and up and running."

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Anglican Church in Sydney. He was a gracious, gentle, non-sensational character who took Jesus' words at face value. Hundreds of independently attested miracles of healing of all kinds followed this man of God. It was Jim Glennon who first taught me how to pray the "prayer of faith" according to **Mark 11: 22-24)**

<sup>5</sup> The apostle Paul was "**untimely born**" and met and saw Jesus physically alive as he explains in **I Cor. 15**. Since then, nobody has seen Jesus in his new immortalised body despite claims by some to the contrary. At best we may say such experiences are visions of the risen Lord.

<sup>6</sup> Individual healings in **Acts 3: 1-16; 9:10-19, 32-35, 36-42; 14: 8-10; 16: 16-18; 20: 7-12; 28: 3-6**; Multiple occasions in **Acts 2: 43; 5: 12-16; 6: 8; 8: 5- 9, 34; 14: 3; 8-10; 19: 11-12; 28: 9.**

I am firmly convinced this “dispensational” teaching has robbed the church of Christ of so much of our inheritance.

As if Israel enjoyed greater blessings than we do under the New Covenant! Perish the thought!

As if Abraham could pray **to God and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maids, so that they bore children**, but we can't pray for each other that way today (Gen. 20: 17)!

As if Moses could pray for his sister, **“Heal her now, O God, I beseech You”** (Num. 12:13) and we can't pray for our loved ones' healing the same way?

As if the LORD who **heard Hezekiah, and healed the people** will not hear such prayers today (2 Chron. 30:20)!

As if the Psalmist who praised God, **“O LORD my God, I cried unto You, and You have healed me”** (Ps.30:2), or who said, **“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy Name ... who forgives all your iniquity, Who heals all your diseases “** (Ps. 103: 1-3) could have a greater testimony than the Christian believer today!

As if God's heart for Israel included body, soul and spirit, but now only includes “the spiritual” for the Church!

What? Is our inheritance in Christ poorer than those under the old Mosaic covenant? God forbid. Aren't we now members of the **commonwealth of Israel** and no longer **strangers to the covenants of promise** (Eph. 2: 12)? Aren't all God's promises in Christ, **“Yes and Amen to the glory of God”** ( 2 Cor. 1: 20 )? I say, away with this God-dishonouring, Christ-denying, Gospel-dissipating, New Covenant-cancelling, Bible-doubting doctrine that God is no longer in the business of taking care of us physically.

And what about the NT Scriptures that tell us it is our heavenly Father's will that we enjoy health and healing in body, soul and spirit? For example,

**And may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely, and your whole spirit and soul and body be kept in full health at the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Thess. 5: 23).** <sup>7</sup> Or,

**Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers (3 John 2).** Or,

**Don't you know that you are the temple of God, and that His Spirit dwells in you? If anyone corrupts (lit. seduces, leads astray, destroys, ruins, defiles) the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are (I Cor. 3: 16-17).** Which is to say, our bodies have been redeemed and belong to God and it's our responsibility to take care of the physical body as God's temple. We are to be good caretakers of our bodies (by what we eat, by how we work, rest and play, by what we think and say, by how we treat others. That's our part. God's part is to give us the health and vigour to honour Him and do His will in the body He has made for His purposes.

This little selection of NT verses ought to convince us that God's people are to be no less happy and healthy than His people Israel were meant to be. He wants our whole body, soul and spirit to be renewed and strong. He wants us to include in our prayer-requests for ourselves and for each other the daily desire for health to love Him and others with all our strength. Surely, even praying for our daily bread ought to convince us of this truth? So, when I ask Him daily for the resurrection-life of His Son to be manifest in me, am I not asking according to His will and bringing the future kingdom in some measure to fruition now?

I will say, that for good reason, many are skeptical about exaggerated reports and sensational healing practices by today's “apostles of healing”. Some of us have been hurt and disappointed by charlatans who

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<sup>7</sup> Clearly the apostle's hope was that Jesus' *Parousia* would occur during his lifetime. Paul's prayer for the Christian church was that they be *oloteleis* (wholly, in every part) and *olokleerov* (fully and soundly whole) alive at the coming of Christ. The fact that Christ's *parousia* did not occur for that first generation in no way cancels out the apostle's wish --- and therefore God's expressed will for us today in **body, soul and spirit**.

promise “snake oil” healings. Some have even been crushed by being told they were not healed because they lacked proper faith. No wonder many sincere and needy souls are confused as to whether the Gospel of Christ includes the healing commission for today.

## PASTORAL ADVICE

We need some pastoral help here, and we need confirmation that we are on the right track when we say the Gospel of Christ includes health and healing today. This is found in the book of James. **James 5: 14-15** proves the early churches continued Jesus’ ministry of healing as well as preaching;

**Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will [1] save the sick, and [2] the Lord will raise them up; and [3] anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven (NRSV).**

**This is an *unqualified* promise for healing!** If anyone becomes sick and has enough faith to call the authorised representatives of the church, the elders, and asks for **the prayer of faith** for their healing, then they are acting within the will of God. <sup>8</sup>

Few Bible readers realise this is *exactly* what Jesus authorised his followers to do; **They ... anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them (Mark 6: 13). *The same authority given to the Twelve is given to the elders of the Christian church when they also anoint with oil and pray for the sick!***

If we follow this pastoral advice, such obedience will bring three promises to pass, says James --- and observe how they cover the entire range of our human need:-

1. **The sick person will be saved.**
2. **The Lord will raise him or her up.**
3. **Sins will be forgiven.**

I say again. God’s response to the obedience of faith in the Church results in the whole range of salvation. In other words, the church’s obedience will prove no less effective than was seen in that first generation of Christians as they proclaimed the Gospel of the kingdom **and** healed the sick!

And don’t miss that this shows how truly “evangelistic” the healing ministry of the church was and should be. It begins at the point of a deep and real physical (or mental) need, but progresses to the eternal things of the kingdom!

**James 5: 14-15** is therefore in sync with the rest of the NT evidence. James’s pastoral advice endorses healing as part of the ministry of the church of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of the kingdom is forever linked to all that the “salvation package” of the kingdom of God offers a needy world, both now and for the future.

## OBJECTION!

Someone will counter, “But Greg, it ought to be obvious that as the New Testament proceeds, the references to healing get fewer and fewer. Didn’t this miraculous ministry of healing peter out to barely a whisper by the time the first century closed?”

Well, if declining references are the basis for our doctrine and practice, the same can be said about baptism and the Lord’s Supper! The Lord’s Supper is referred to a dozen times in the Gospels and Acts, but only once in the Epistles. Baptism is referred to in the Gospels and Acts around eighty times, but less than twenty times in the Epistles. And who in their right exegetical mind argues these sacraments petered out on the basis of declining references?

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<sup>8</sup> I will look at **the prayer of faith** in our third instalment.

Anybody who knows a modicum of Ante-Nicene church history, knows the sad story of sure and steady decline from the vibrancy of apostolic faith towards compromise, controversy, and apostasy. The loss of burning devotion to Christ and descent into lukewarmness with the world saw a corresponding loss of holy Spirit power in the church's witness.

Doesn't the NT teach that the gifts of the Spirit (which include healing) are **the manifestation of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7)**? If the gifts are not in evidence today does it not show how far short we are from the gold standard of the NT narrative? God's kingdom-program has not changed. Jesus' Gospel-word is still **the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1: 16)**.

Perhaps the now risen Lord Jesus has changed his mind or lost his power or his compassion for the sick? Perhaps the very nature of the Kingdom of God has changed in the meantime? Perhaps we imagine we can change the Gospel message of the kingdom by dropping part of Jesus' words? Perhaps the real truth is that we are like the hometown folks in Nazareth who limited even the faith and power of Jesus when **he could not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief (Matt. 13:58)**? Perhaps it's because we are not convinced that Jesus expected his full instructions to be taken in perpetuity until his return and that the Gospel commission was only for that first generation?

How can this be seriously entertained? Jesus' post-resurrection commission to the church is to go into all the world making disciples of all peoples **teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you (Matt. 28: 18-20)**. Part of the **everything** included in Jesus' gospel-message about the kingdom of God was the **"... and"** part --- the **"and heal the sick"** part.

Jesus prayed:, **"As You [Father] have sent me into the world, so have I sent them into the world" (John 17:18)**. Jesus included all subsequent generations of believers in his Gospel instructions when he prayed for all those who would believe in him through their gospel-word ...

**"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who will believe in me through their word" (v. 20)**. As they were sent, so are we sent.

If I am reading this right, the kingdom-plan has not changed and has been passed on to all generations until the return of Christ. Our generation is responsible for that same great commission. Which means we are sent out and authorised to preach the same Gospel of the kingdom **and** healing in the Name of Jesus. Yet to a large degree the modern Church has left half the commission behind! And then we scratch our heads wondering why the other half seems so ineffective!

Stay tuned for the third instalment on the question, **"Does the Gospel of the Kingdom Include Healing for Today?"** I am aware there are other objections to what I have written so far. I ask for your grace and patience!