

## Graceful Healing

I want to share with you some foundational thoughts concerning healing today. I want to invite you to think about healing in perhaps a different way - a different approach - and I hope to explain my reasoning for this as we go along.

Let's start at the beginning of the gospel. What was the message Jesus came preaching? **“Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.” Matthew 4:17.** Jesus came announcing that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. What did that mean? This was not a physical place he was talking about. The kingdom of heaven was not a place where God ruled but the fact that God ruled or that he soon would rule over this world.

Jesus showed the people that the kingdom of heaven was coming but it looked differently than what they had expected. The first century Jewish audience had an understanding of what the kingdom of heaven would look like – the exiles would return to the land, God would rule over Israel and evil would be destroyed. That's what they expected, but Jesus came declaring something different, something more. The kingdom of heaven wasn't about a restored Israel, it wasn't about a new nation, it was about a new heart, a new creation, a new people. It was about more than Jewish exiles returning to their land, it was about the captive being set free from sin and shame. It was about a new life, a new reality - and it was being announced and inaugurated in and through the person of Jesus Christ – through his life, his teaching, his miracles, signs and wonders, his death and his resurrection. The kingdom of heaven was at hand and redemption's plan had reached critical mass.

Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven as being here, present and among them and as a sign of the kingdom, he healed the sick and cast out devils. The miracles were signs of the nature and the authority of the kingdom of heaven at work here and now. This is what the kingdom of heaven will look like. Yet Jesus also spoke of the kingdom of heaven as a future reality - when we would see the Son of Man coming in clouds of glory. He spoke of the kingdom of heaven and its authority as both now and not yet, as both present and future. That is important for us to remember as we talk about healing. The New Testament reveals to us a kingdom that is both here now and not yet.

Jesus was announcing the kingdom of heaven looks like this – sin is forgiven, the sick are healed, the lame walk, the blind, both physically and spiritually are made to see, the poor and

oppressed receive good news, those unjustly accused and wrongly imprisoned will receive justice and will be set free. Healing is a part of what is now and in an ultimate sense what will be. It is a sign that points to Jesus as healer, that points to his nature as a healer, that points to what will be complete, in fullness when this kingdom is fully come. It is a sign that testifies of his love and power. Healing is a powerful sign of the presence of the kingdom of heaven, but it is also a sign that reminds us that kingdom is not yet fully manifested. The temporary nature of all healing here reminds us we aren't there yet - it points to that eternal day of ultimate healing. That day will come when we stand redeemed and complete in his glorious presence. The kingdom of heaven is now and not yet.

Not yet is everyone healed. Not yet is sickness and disease banished from the kingdom. Not yet is death and decay no more. Not yet has God wiped all the tears from our eyes (that happens in Revelation 21, not Isaiah 53). This body is still sown in weakness, it is still perishable, it is still subject to decay, but the day will come...the bible declares it to be so... the day will come and then...Paul says, when the perishable has been clothed with imperishable, then when mortal is clothed with immortality, then when death has been swallowed up in victory, then we will rejoice and declare death has lost its sting, the grave has lost its victory and sickness and disease and sin and heartbreak will be no more.

But between here and eternity, there is still sickness and disease, there is still sin and evil, there is still heartache and sorrow and grief and there is still a need for healing and deliverance and comfort and divine intervention. No amount of prayer, positive faith confessions, declaring the word or anything else is going to change this reality. In this life, on this side of eternity, Christians still get sick and everyday Christians die. So, understanding that sickness and illness will be part of life until we get to heaven, do we stop praying and believing for healing? No! We pray and believe for healing because the bible tells us to trust, to come in faith, to believe, to pray because while the kingdom of heaven is not yet manifested in its fullness, it is nevertheless also near, here, now, among us. We come asking and expecting, because we know Jesus and we know of his great love and compassion and grace. And this is where I want to suggest something of a different paradigm, a different approach for us with regard to healing.

I went to a Benny Hinn service at Mabee Center years ago. I watched as people came forward testifying of healing, as Benny prayed for the audience. "Do you want this anointing?"

(whatever that meant) and waved his hand over the crowd on the count of three and people fell everywhere. After all the crowd had gone, among the few that remained was a girl in a wheel chair, still there, wanting someone to pray for her. And I wondered what was going through her mind. What was the message she left with that night? “What’s wrong with me that I couldn’t get healed? Was it a lack of faith? That’s the answer isn’t it, because that’s what everyone tells me. It must be my lack of faith.” What does the church say to her?

I had a couple sitting in my office a few years back. He was gravely ill with a debilitating disease. Well meaning friends had told them the things he needed to do in order to get his healing. Listen only to worship music or to the word on cd. Confess these things. Exercise your faith. Say it, do it, so you can receive it. Don’t doubt or you’ll lose the ground you’ve gained. They were mentally and emotionally exhausted. They were tormented with the thought they weren’t doing enough to get God to heal him. They must not have enough faith to trip the healing trigger. Maybe they hadn’t done enough to qualify for healing. That’s the way it felt to them. I told them to go home, turn off the praise and worship music and listen to the Beach Boys or the Beatles or someone (they were older than me), watch an episode of Andy Griffith, go for a walk and enjoy each other’s company and rest in the grace of God. They let out a sigh of relief and went home.

In both of those circumstances, someone had made healing all about us and our level of faith. Somewhere in all the teaching about faith and healing, the church has lost the plot! We have so focused on faith as the key ingredient to healing that I think it has blurred our focus. We stopped having faith in God as our faithful Father and healer and started teaching people to have faith in the level of their faith. Have faith in the confession of your mouth. Have faith in how well you carry out the instructions of faith teaching. It became all about faith. “You don’t have enough faith. You have to build up your faith. You have to release your faith. You have to learn how to use your faith to get what you want from God. You have to focus your faith. You have to be specific in your faith and your confession. Learn how to write your own ticket with God. One word of faith teacher said, “That’s what you’ve got to learn to do to get things from God: have faith in your faith.”

“Learn to get things from God.” Really? How would that make you feel if you were a parent and you overheard your children talking, plotting: “I’m going to teach you how to get

things from Dad, from the Old Man. Here's what you do first..." That's not faith, that's manipulation. That's not the kind of relationship I want to have with my children or with my father. Teaching someone how to get something from someone sounds like using people, not loving people. To me it's a flawed premise. You are starting from the wrong place when you approach God like that. It's simply the wrong approach.

Arnold Prater, a Methodist evangelist I met years ago wrote, "If you believe in a God who answers prayer only according to the amount of faith a person has, you have to deal with my question: How much faith does it take? Does it take a pound? A gallon? An ounce? ...Once more, what you believe about faith reveals the kind of God whom you believe."

I believe in a God of grace, who out of his compassion and mercy and grace brings good gifts into the life of his children. I believe my heavenly Father knows what is best for me and when I ask in faith, I receive his best. I can trust his will and plans and his purpose for my life because of the relationship we share. Sometimes he may answer my prayer with healing and sometimes, out of his sovereign wisdom and purpose he may answer my prayer with the strength and grace to endure and carry on, like Larry and Dee McNeill shared last Sunday. But I can trust in him and in his amazing grace. I trust him to do what is right in my life based not upon my ability to manipulate him into giving me what I want, but based upon the loving relationship we have, a relationship established by his grace.

And there is the key for me. Grace. How are you saved? By grace or by faith? What does the bible say? Look at Ephesians 2. Twice in the first 10 verses Paul tells us "it is by grace you have been saved." Look at verse 8 – **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."** Ephesians 2:8-10

What if we substituted the word healed for the word saved in this passage. "For it is by grace you have been healed, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast." Healed by his grace, through faith. Yes, but not by our works, not by my efforts, so that no one can boast. I don't think healing comes by our efforts to earn healing anymore than salvation comes by trying to earn it, yet I get the feeling at times that people are trying to teach us how to earn our healing. If you want your healing, do these five

things.

I want us to think about healing from a grace focused paradigm rather than a faith focused paradigm. Hear what I am saying, I am not discounting the importance of faith. We are saved and healed by his grace, through faith. Even the faith is a gift from God. We must have faith and Jesus certainly responded to the faith of the people he healed. Have you wondered how much faith did the first century crowd have when they expressed faith in Jesus? They didn't know him as God incarnate, as the second person of the Trinity, as the Alpha and Omega, as the One who spoke the world into existence. They had faith in him as a Jewish prophet, as a miracle worker who might be the Messiah, the Anointed One. When we speak of having faith in Jesus to heal us, we have much more knowledge about who he is and consequently I believe we have more faith. So hear me again, I'm not discounting the importance of faith. It is by grace through faith we are saved and healed. But I'm going to use this phrase "faith-focused" to refer to an approach to healing that is common among a lot of us charismatic/pentecostal folk. Certainly we must come to God in faith. That's the only way we can come to him so I'm not discounting faith when I use this term, I'm just trying to show the contrast between a couple of approaches to understanding healing. So think of a grace focused approach and a faith focused approach.

Grace is about unmerited, unearned favor that comes from God toward us. We can't earn it or deserve it or generate it. We can't do anything to get God to offer us more grace. So much of the faith focused approach to healing seems to focus on the level of our faith generated by us toward God. Like Dr. Prater said, how much faith does it take? An ounce or a pound? It can leave us feeling defeated and condemned like the couple I spoke of, "I can't seem to generate enough faith to get God to respond to me. I want to be healed but I haven't been able to produce enough faith." If grace is unmerited, unearned favor, then why do we think we can merit healing by our outstanding ability to exercise faith?

Grace is about his love reaching us where we are but much of the faith focused approach to healing seems to focus on us and our performance trying to reach to where he is. Increase your faith, release your faith, focus your faith, keep your faith, if only you had enough faith.

Grace is about his giving freely to us but much of the faith focused approach to healing seems to focus not on his giving but on our getting. We say, "I'm going to get my healing." Is it his healing I'm receiving or is it my healing I'm getting? Is it his healing manifested in my body

or is it my healing claimed by my confession? Does that healing I receive flow out of his grace and from his very nature, or does healing come because I adequately and rightly apply a formula? Does healing come from the hand of a loving and wise Heavenly Father whose sovereign purpose for my life is to be trusted or does it come from a God who is obligated to do what I declare according to my level of faith?

Please understand what I'm saying. I'm not trying to start a debate or fight with anyone, and God bless you if you've found healing through this faith focused approach, but for some of us, it is exhausting and defeating and dis-ingenuous. I listened one evening at a meeting I attended as someone explained how to get your healing and then what you needed to do to keep that healing. You had to continue to speak these things and maintain this attitude or you could lose your healing. I left the meeting and said, "I'd rather just stay sick than have to go through all those mental and spiritual exercises to try to keep the healing. I'm not up to it."

I don't think God is asking you to work harder to get healed. I think he is asking us to trust in him and in his grace. He invites us to rest in his arms of mercy and peace, to come to him on the basis of the relationship we have with him, a relationship that he initiated. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. He invites us to come to him by grace, through faith, and in him we find all we need. His salvation, his healing, his strength, his comfort, his understanding, his mercy, his peace.

He is our heavenly Father. He freely gave his son to die on the cross to save us from our sins. Paul says **"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also along with him, graciously give us all things?" Romans 8:32** He is not withholding healing until you perform for him or until you can produce additional levels of faith, but physical healing may not be part of his plan and purpose in your life right now. Know this: You can trust him!

Trust in his Sovereignty. Trust in His holy and divine purposes for you and your life. Submit your life to the Lordship of Christ and trust Him. Trust Him as your healer. Trust him rather than trusting your faith. Our faith is not in our faith or in the level of our faith, our faith is in Jesus, the Healer. Relax. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Come, by grace through faith and enter in.