

## **Acts 9:31-43 Healing in the church today**

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It began for me way back in 1996. .

St Andrews Church Cullompton we were at a service with prayer for healing. Ann Roberts had been in a wheelchair with a benign tumour of her spine for the last six years or so, sensed a voice behind her saying 'get up'. She looked round and saw no one there but understood it to be God speaking to her, and as the worship and prayer was going on around her, she stood up and walked about for the first time for years. She also had poor eyesight such that she could only read large print books, but realised that God had healed her eyesight too, so she stood up and read a few Bible aloud to us all.

A little later Sarah, a friend of Ruth's, was healed of arthritis in her fingers instantly at another prayer meeting.

1999, Trinity College, Bristol, Chris one of the students, two weeks after he had fractured his collar bone was waving around an x-ray which showed that the bone that have been broken have been completely restored with no sign of fracture ever having been there.

2010, in Zambia I was privileged to be on the prayer ministry team as a discipleship conference. One man was healed of deafness. Another pain in his chest where he had been kicked by a cow... I particularly remember him because he told everyone that had never experienced the

touch of the holy spirit in that way before, and that if his wife and walked over to him and invited him to go to bed with him that moment, he would much rather stay where he was resting in the presence of God.

At the New Wine conference last year a friend of ours had bought someone she had met at the Citizen's Advice Bureau in Exeter who was registered blind, on the waiting list for a guide dog, but whose sight was instantly restored when people have prayed with her in one of the seminars.

Last year, someone from our congregation here's sister was due to have surgery for an intestinal mass that following our prayers here incredibly disappeared just before the surgery was due. The same thing happened to someone else with severely enlarged tonsils

**Does God heal today?** Yes I believe he does. But it is very faith stretching and it is also confusing, because God heals people through the work of the health service today as well... He looks on Torbay Hospital with great delight as people go about his kingdom healing work

And it is also confusing – because as we know full well, God does not to heal every disease we ask him to, and there are people who we love very much who suffer – and die.

So I do know this is a very difficult subject to tackle, but God's word for today is so much about this, that we cannot ignore the challenge.

So it is faith stretching. It is confusing. But it's not at all surprising that God heals today.

It was obviously a hallmark of Jesus's ministry. Have you ever wondered why?

1 to demonstrate his compassion on people: do you remember the leper who came to Jesus in the very first chapter of Mark's Gospel and asked, on his knees "if you are willing you can make me clean?" ... And Jesus reply? Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing, be clean"

2 to demonstrate God's desire for wholeness as part of what Jesus calls the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God

3 Jesus healed to demonstrate his own identity as Messiah, as son of God, healed because he wanted to draw everyone to himself.

And of course Jesus intended it to be the hallmark of those who would follow him. Those who listen to the voice of the good Shepherd, and follow him, and even do as he does – with an obedience, and faith-filled expectancy. Probably share these verses with you before: Do you remember how he sent out his first disciples:

Matthew 10:8 *as you go, preach this message: the kingdom of heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons....*

And then he says at the end of Matthew's Gospel in the great commission:

*therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the holy spirit, and teaching them **to obey everything I have commanded you.** And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*

John 14:12 *I tell you the truth, anyone **who has faith in me** will do what I have been doing. They will do even greater things than these because I am going to the father.*

Well since Jesus did indeed Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out Demons.... faith stretching, and confusing, and surprising as it may sound that is what he calls us to do too.

To listen to the voice of the Shepherd. And follow in his footsteps...

And that's exactly what Peter did.

**Read Acts 9:31 to 43.**

The account takes place just after Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus; and events happen in the town of Lydda, which is 25 miles west of Jerusalem, and then 12 miles further on, on the coast, is the town of Joppa, the modern day Jaffa near Tel Aviv.

**Who had faith? How was it shown?**

- Peter prayed for Aeneas – made it clear it is Jesus who was healing;
- Clearly Peter was full of faith, had learned to follow his Master's voice, and was also very assured of the healing gift of the Holy Spirit he had received as well -
- maybe Aeneas?
- the disciples in Joppa
- less so in Tabitha's grieving friends – notice how Peter sends them out of the room, just as Jesus died in a similar situation with Jairus's daughter – [and then invited back]

### **What was the result?**

- Healing,- and resuscitation – it's not the same as resurrection however incredible it is... Tabitha went on to die as we shall all die. Actually the raising of the dead is only recorded twice in the New Testament records of the life of the early church and I have no experience of this today, but I have heard of it happening, nevertheless.
- And importantly Verse 35, verse 42:  
The effect of healing in both cases here was to honour Jesus's name and bring new people to faith because of the way that the news was shared.

### **what stands out?**

that faith levels were high, just as they were in all of the occasions that I bear witness to at the beginning

of this talk - where there is faith- filled expectation that Jesus will act.

### **But what is it about this prayer for healing and wholeness that makes faith so key?**

In so much of Jesus teaching he makes it clear that faith has to be somewhere in the equation. John Wimber writes: 'Faith is the medium through which God releases his healing power'.

- In Matthew 13:58; we read that *he could not do many miracles in Nazareth because of their lack of faith*
- Yet to the women who have been bleeding for many years in Luke 8:48 who reached out just to touch Jesus, he says... '*Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace*'
- But if you are here today, and want to ask God for healing, its really helpful to note that as Wimber reminds us - in the NT the sick person is never chastised for lack of faith
- [ Matthew 9:2 ] Jesus forgave and healed the paralytic lowered before him on a mat because of the faith of the man's friends

Even a mustard seed of faith is enough Jesus says – but if that is the case Jesus, let's be honest, we've often even less faith than that. So how can we increase our faith?

- 1 We can simply ask for more faith. I think our prayer to Jesus as so often like the father of the sick boy in

Mark chapter 9: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

- 2 Faith is less of a feeling and more of a decision – choose to have faith – Wimber said that Faith is spelled R.I.S.K.
- 3 Faith also enlarges when we come humbly before the most mighty God in worship together. That's why we most often encourage prayer for healing as part of our worship services.
- 4 Just as faith can decrease if we surround ourselves with disbelief – which may be why Peter sent out Dorcas' mourners and pointedly makes sure they see her alive again afterwards...

Faith enlarges when we encourage one another with what the Lord has done in our own lives. So if God heals we need to tell people!

### **How do we pray for healing?**

- we simply need to start praying. Obedience to pray, as a church, aware of our particular giftings
- But we also need to pray in faith – James tells us to gather elders together to pray if we are sick and anoint with oil...that's why we do that sometimes here
- And God seems to respond to our obedience and faith-filled expectancy **when it is also clear that**

**when he does heal, he knows that we will we give him the glory for it.**

Remember what happened in our reading today.

I have found the advice of Jack Deere, the speaker on that night in Cullompton that I began with today helpful. To those who are reluctant to pray because they have been so disappointed so often: *"if you don't take the credit, you don't take the blame."*

It is not our responsibility to try to second-guess why God does not heal some people, however angry at times we might be with him for it... And the Psalms are full of those expressions of grief... so do not be afraid to tell the Lord how you feel – it is not necessarily your lack of faith...But it is our responsibility to honour him for when he does heal and our calling to trust him for what he does not seem to do.

In fact the opening lines of the Lord's prayer sum it up so well when we come to pray for healing:

**our father in heaven...** Our compassionate father who knows our needs

**hallowed be your name...** Whatever happens your name is to be honoured

**your kingdom come...** We can tell God who we want healing and wholeness for because that is God's ultimate aim for us all. Sometimes it is hard to know what to pray – especially for very elderly people because our human

bodies will all wear out – and I confess that I have not begun to pray for people who have just died...so I find it helpful to see Peter kneeling in prayer before he prays directly to Dorcas –

**your will be done...** But even stepping out with obedience and expectancy we have to acknowledge that he is the Lord and we are not. And it's really tricky getting that balance right between expectancy and faith on the one hand which can so easily lead to an arrogance or presumption, and between humility and trust when someone is not healed as we wish which can so easily lead to fatalism or lack of faith.

Nevertheless, I believe God wants to meet us here today. I believe God wants to use us as a Christian community, using all of the gifts the holy Spirit has given to us as the body of Christ here, to follow in the footsteps of the Shepherd, listening for his voice, to know what to pray for...to demonstrate Jesus our compassionate Lord to the world. And I believe that the healing ministry is part of that work of God among us here.

Bishop Maurice Maddox, in his very helpful manual about the Christian healing ministry writes this:

*The Christian Fellowship of those days became an embodiment of Christ's promise to be in the midst where two or three were gathered together. The power of Christ was always experienced when they were together...*

Well right now, the same Lord is here, His Spirit is with us...

Let's pray for one another – have the humility to see your own need for healing and wholeness - make use of our prayer ministry team

Let's ask for more faith

Let's encourage faith to grow

And let's seek to honour the name of Jesus, and as we tell others what he has done for us, we will see more people come to a living faith in him. Amen