

Msg #126 of Scripture Beneath The Surface

“Call For The Elders”

With Randy Smith

(269) 763-2114

Preparation Ministries, Inc

PO BOX 475 OLIVET, MI 49076

preparationministries@gmail.com

(Please feel free to call, or send messages)

Broadcast Schedule

WOLY AM 1500 - Battle Creek, Sat. 10am - Sun. 9:30am

WLQV AM 1500 - Detroit, Sun. 10am

Also, Internet Stream - www.am1500wlqv.com

WFPM

99.5 FM in Battle Creek

99.9 FM in Albion

103.7 FM in Jackson

Also, Internet Stream - www.wfpmradio.org

Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today I'd like to talk about healing. Not the gift of healing, but about prayer for healing. There is a difference. What I'd like to do is start out by reading a couple of verses from James, chapter 5. Starting with verse 14, it says, "is any sick among you? Let them call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: 15 and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him."

Now, what I'd like to do is to break these verses down and look at them more closely. First of all, notice that the subject of these verses is what to do if anyone is sick. Now, I know what we generally do in this present day is to go to the doctor. And, I'm not suggesting you can't do that. But for the purpose of our topic today, let's just stick with what the Bible is telling us. It says that if anyone is sick that they should call for the elders of the church. This is the first thing. This is what the sick person does. Now, the reason the Bible tells us to call for the elders of the church is because it is the elders of the church who are supposed to be mature in the faith. When it's talking about elders, it's not talking about old people. When we're talking about spiritual things, we need to realize that in the spiritual sense an elder is a person who has matured in their walk of faith. When you're a new baby Christian your faith is just beginning. But, over time your faith increases as your knowledge of God increases. The Bible tells us that God teaches us by line upon line and precept upon precept. Here a little and there a little. The faith of a Christian grows as his understanding grows.

If you're sick, then you want someone to pray for you who has a lot of faith. So this is the first thing that a person does when they're sick. They look for someone whose faith in God is strong, whose faith has matured.

Now, the next thing that we see in verse 14 is further instruction, but this instruction is now for the elders. This verse tells us what the elders are supposed to do when they are summoned to pray for the sick. Notice that verse 14 is specific directions to the elders. It says they should do two things. The first thing is that they should pray, and the second thing is that they should anoint the sick person with oil.

Now, it doesn't say that the elders are supposed to command a person to be well. We're not talking here about the gift of healing that comes by the Holy Spirit. We have an example of that gift as when Peter and John went into the temple and were confronted with a crippled man. If you remember that portion of Scripture, the crippled man had been begging for money. Peter had looked at the crippled man and said, "silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I unto you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." This was clearly a demonstration of the miraculous. This was not a prayer by Peter, but a command. But what we read in James 5:14 is not talking about commanding sickness to depart. It is about praying that God would deliver the person from sickness. There is a difference between commanding the sickness to depart and praying to God for that deliverance. When the gift of healing is in operation, the person operating in that gift already believes they have the answer. They believe that God has shown them very clearly by his Holy Spirit that he wants to heal that person. But in James 5:14, the emphasis is on petitioning God. We petition God when we have not already been shown what his will is.

There are many people in the church today who claim that God wants to heal everyone. If that was true, then there would be no need for praying. Think about it. You don't ask God to do something if he is already showing you what to do. Can you imagine telling your kids to take the garbage out, and they respond by saying, "do you want me to take the garbage out?" It would be a little exasperating to have your children ask you a question when you've already told them the answer. It's the same thing for God. If God is already given you his answer, then you just go ahead and commence carrying it through. That would be the gift of healing. But if God is not yet given you his answer, then you pray.

Elders know this, or at least they should know this. A person who really is matured in the faith understands that they don't claim something to have happened before God has shown them what his will is. So either way, if you've been referred to as an elder, and have been called to pray for someone, then if God has already shown you what his will is in that given situation, then just go ahead and make the necessary statements just as Peter did to the crippled man at the gate Beautiful. However, if you've been called to pray, and God has not yet revealed his will, then pray. Don't try to claim something that God has not revealed to you.

Now, in verse 15 of James, chapter 5, it says the prayer of faith will save the sick. A prayer of faith is something that is spoken to God. You don't pray to sickness, you don't pray to sick people, and you don't pray to evil spirits to depart. If you are going to pray, you are going to speak to God. If you're speaking to God, you ask him to do something, and then it is up to God what he does. Your faith is not that it has already taken place, but your faith is in the God of heaven who is a just God, and who is a loving God, and who will honor the faith of him who knows that God can heal when he wants to.

The faith of an elder is determined by his level of understanding of the word of God. If you have a great understanding of the word of God, then you will have great faith in God. If you pray for the sick, and God reveals to you what his will is, then go ahead and claim it. But if God has not yet revealed it, then don't tell God what he has to do.

Another important thing to consider is that the elder is the one who is going to pray. It is not the sick person who is praying, and it is not the sick person who is supposed to have the faith to heal themselves. If it was up to the sick person to have enough faith for healing, then why would they call for the elders in the first place? James says that the prayer of faith will heal the sick. James doesn't say that the faith of the sick will heal the sick. There are many people who claim to be elders and will pray for people who are sick, and then when the person is not healed they will blame the lack of healing on the sick person themselves. But verse 15 says that it is the prayer of faith which will make the difference, not the faith of the person being prayed for.

You may think this is splitting hairs, but it is important to realize that when a person is sick, and they need help because of it, they wouldn't call the elders of the church if they could already do it themselves. Elders don't need to beat the sick people to death by accusing them of not having enough faith to be healed. They had enough faith to call for the elders of the church, and that's all that is required for the sick people. People who are called to pray for other people need to stop condemning the sick just because their own faith is not great enough to bring about the necessary healing. To blame the lack of faith on the sick person is really pretty silly if you think about it enough. Just consider a sick person who is unconscious, and the elders are called into pray. Then the elders pray for the sick, nothing happens, and then the elders blame the sick person for not having enough faith. Duh! Whatever happened to elders of the church who will simply acknowledge that God has not healed instead of blaming someone else. If there is blame, then the elders need to stop passing the buck. Can't you just see an elder blaming a dead person for not believing enough to be raised from the dead? Hmmmmm!

In the days that Jesus sent his 12 disciples out, we have the record of Jesus coming upon a situation where his disciples could not cast the evil spirit out of a man's son. When the disciples asked Jesus why they could not cast out the evil spirit, Jesus did not reply that the man had lacked sufficient faith. His reply was that the disciple's faith was weak. So, the bottom line is this. When someone is sick, they are instructed to call for the elders of the church in order that men of faith will pray for them. The elders are instructed to pray, petitioning God for mercy.

Now, there is a second part of the instruction for elders. It specifically says that the elders are to anoint the sick person with oil. You might think this is antiquated. You might think this is just an Old Testament thing. But James is not an Old Testament doctrine. This is instruction for the New Testament Church. You also might say that this was just a social ritual of old times and that it doesn't make any sense today. But then, that's a common mistake of modern-day Christians. God doesn't tell us something in his word that becomes outdated. If something was to change, God would give us instruction, explaining the change. It's not too smart to sweep things under the carpet just because they come from a time we don't understand. Besides, the real reason that people were anointed with oil is not because the oil itself did anything, but the act of anointing does do something. It's not the oil that makes a difference. The real difference is how the elder perceives the sick person he is anointing. Let me explain what I mean.

In Scripture, oil is used to symbolize the purification of objects or people. The purification would take place as the oil was applied. Now, it's important to realize that nothing is pure and holy except God himself. Therefore, the only possible way anyone can be pure and holy is to be made that way by God. The oil symbolizes the presence of God in Spirit, and as the oil is applied, it is representative that the Spirit of God himself rests upon the person. This is a claim by the elder that the sick person is righteous, and therefore deserves to be delivered from the curse of sin. This is a demonstration of faith on the part of the elder, and therefore he can pray the prayer of faith and expect God to answer that prayer.

Think of this. Unless an elder believes the sick person is absolutely worthy of healing, then how else can he pray in faith that God would heal the person? It's pretty simple and straightforward. If the elder has determined that the sick person is a brother or sister in Christ, then this establishes the elders confidence that God should and will answer his prayer. If the elder is not certain that the sick person is truly a Christian, then they can hardly pray the prayer of faith. You can't expect God to approve of the sick person when you don't approve of that person yourself.

Now, you may not believe that God heals in this present day. You may think that times have changed and God has given doctors and hospitals in place of God's provision. But God has not changed. We are the ones who have changed. No, as I said before, I'm not against going to the doctor. However, when we can no longer have enough faith to pray and receive from God without turning to man's own ability of science and technology, instead of trying to rewrite the Bible, why don't we just admit that we are a people that have strayed so far from the understanding of God that we no longer have sufficient faith without the crutch of science? Whether or not you believe in healing, that's up to you. But I would encourage you not to ignore the Bible when it gives us specific directions on the subject.

Sometimes we don't want to follow scripture because we don't understand why it says what it says. But if the command is plain, I believe we need to follow God's direction and not wait until we can figure out why he said what he said. It's very plain and simple to just realize that the Bible says that if you are sick, call for someone who has more faith in yourself to pray for you. In the Bible also says that those who pray should anoint with oil. To me, that's enough of itself.

But then, you can also continue to pray that God will give you understanding. There are many things in Scripture that we don't understand, but when we do know that God has told us to do something, it's not a good idea to put it off because we can't figure out why God said it.

Now there's one more interesting portion of verse 15 that we haven't covered yet. It says that if the person is healed, then any sins they may have committed will be forgiven them. Have you ever stopped to wonder why verses dealing with healing are also dealing with sins? It's important to realize that because of sin in this world, we are under the curse of sin. There was no curse in the earth until sin entered. Therefore, it's important to acknowledge our sinful nature. It doesn't mean that every person who is sick is in the throes of sin. However, we are all born into sin. Sin permeates the world, and therefore the curse of sin permeates the world. Because you are in the world, then you are under the curse of sin, yet, it is through the blood of Jesus Christ that our righteousness is assured, and therefore we escape the curse of sin because of that righteousness. It is this very concept which gives us the faith to ask deliverance from our sickness.

When we receive the anointing oil, we are actually acknowledging the need for purification. Because we come to God in a state of repentance, we can therefore expect to receive deliverance from the curse of sin. If God Has delivered us from the sin, then we can also be delivered from the sickness brought about by sin.

I know that it's difficult for many Christians to believe that sickness can be a curse from God. But the Bible has many references alluding to the curse of sickness because of the presence of sin. When we are sick, we must be willing to open ourselves before God, and acknowledge our inherent sinfulness, even though we may not be aware of specific sin. Not every person who is sick is overtly sinning. However, every person who is sick is a sinner by nature. And in addition, every person who is sick has been born under sin. Yet, because every Christian is an inheritor of righteousness through Christ Jesus, then we can expect God to heal us when we pray. If you don't believe that you are righteous through the blood of Jesus, then how can you possibly believe that God would heal you? And, if you don't believe God would heal you, why would you call for the elders of the church?

You know, James 5:16 tells us to confess our faults one to another, and to pray for one another, that we might be healed. When you call for the elders of the church, it's not the elders of the church who need to confess their faults. If you're sick, the first thing you need to do is to confess, if there is anything to confess. At the very least you need to have a humble attitude of repentance. We all sin in the flesh. If we remember that we are sinners by nature, and we come to God in a humble state of repentance, then there will be no reason for God to use the sickness as chastening for you. It would be better to come to God in a state of repentance, then to come to God in a state of haughtiness.

I'd like to give you a few scriptures concerning where sickness actually comes from. Now, keep in mind that it is Satan that tempts us to sin, but because of the sin, we come under the curse of sin. When we fall into sin, we can expect God to chasten us. When God chastens us with sickness, it is not to condemn us, but rather to bring us to a state of humble repentance. When we do come into a state of repentance, then we can expect the healing that God promises to those who love him and who turn from their wicked ways. Now, here's the first verse. Job 5:17-18 says, "The Lord wounds and makes whole. He makes sore, and binds up." Notice that it is the Lord who both wounds us, but also makes us whole. Listen to Micah 6:13, where God says, "Therefore also will I make [thee] sick in smiting thee, in making [thee] desolate because of thy sins." Here is a prime example of God causing sickness specifically as a consequence of sin.

Now, 2 Chronicles 21:14-15 says, "Behold, with a great plague will the LORD smite your people, and your children, and your wives, and all your goods: 15 And you shall have great sickness by disease of your bowels, until your bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day." I think you could consider those verses pretty plain and straight forward. Here is God promising great sickness of disease, and well as giving a very graphic description of it.

Here's Deuteronomy 28:59-61. "Then the LORD will make your plagues wonderful, and the plagues of your seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance. 60 Also he will bring upon you all the diseases of Egypt, which you were afraid of; and they shall cleave unto you. 61 Also every sickness, and every plague, which is not written in the book of this law, them will the LORD bring upon you, until you are destroyed."

Now, these are just a few examples of scripture, but it is plain to see that although sin comes because of Satan's temptation, the actual curse of sickness and disease comes from God in response to sin. It is sin which separates us from the presence of God, but it is righteousness which opens the way for us to enter in his presence. Sickness, disease, and adversity are God's way of chastening us in order to bring us to a proper state of humble repentance. It is not God's intention to just make us sick for no reason, but his purpose for chastening us is to bring us to him. When we are sick, we can go to him in a state of repentance, and because we know that our righteousness is assured in Christ, then we can fully expect him to remove the curse of sin.

Now, let me give you one more scripture. This is one that does not promise sickness and disease, but rather promises healing. In Deuteronomy 7:12, God is saying that if we listen to him, and do that which is right, then he will have mercy. Listen to verse 15, and hear the promise of healing God gives to all those who turn from sin. It says, "And the LORD will take away from you all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which you know, upon you; but will lay them upon all those who hate you." Do you hear it? This is our hope in this life, and in addition, we have the promise of eternal life, because we are healed from the ravages of sin.