



You'll remember that last week we started to look at the subject of prayer that is powerful and effective and we had this verse

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

I believe that for our church to grow and thrive as I end my second year as pastor of this church is that we become characterised by powerful and effective prayer. Prayer is talking to God – He's only a prayer away but so often it's a place of last resort for Christians. Here's a comment by a US Lutheran minister called Edward Marquart which I found in my experience is so true.

Some social researchers say that the first casualty of a busy life is time for prayer. Within our busy lives, the first thing to go is prayer. I think that is true. Prayer takes time, silent time and concentration and spiritual focus and energy . Edward Marquart

Prayer is about spending time with God. If you think about it; you don't get to really know someone if you just read what other people say about them, or read about what they have said, maybe watch a DVD with them on, or speak to someone who knows them. You may find out nice things about them but the only true way of getting to know someone is spending time with them.

It's the same with God, we get to know Him by spending time in His presence. Yes, we can read all about Him in His Word, we can hear the testimony of others but we need to spend time with Him.

As I said last week, the study of this passage isn't just about personal prayer, but our corporate prayer life. Why is getting together to worship, or getting together to pray, or getting together as small groups is so important? Not just to have fellowship together, but to have fellowship together in the presence of God so that together we seek His face, together we listen to His voice and together we obey Him and follow Him. That's what church is about.

This passage gives us a number of pointers to prayer that is powerful and effective and we had two of them last week;

◆ Pray with integrity

We take God seriously and do not come with an attitude that uses the name of God lightly. Prayer is serious business: we are coming into the presence of a God who is Creator of the universe and who does make a difference to people's life

◆ Prayer worshipfully

We then considered that we don't just pray when there is a problem, but when things are going well we recognise the source of that wellness – and worship God. It's important that we turn our attitude about prayer on its head and rather than see it as a source of help for when we need it, we recognise who we are and how we function as believers is by the grace of God and we give Him the glory for that in worship.

◆ Pray in faith

14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

“The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well”. People have struggled with these words down the years. Clearly one of the ministries God’s people have is that of healing. We see in these verses the example of prayer by the elders of the church. It could mean the Elders in terms of office or older, more mature Christians who are asked to come and anoint and pray for someone who is sick. Actually as we go down to verse 16 we see the ministry of praying for one another when sick extends to each other. *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*

Just a minute: these words look certain don’t they? If we do these things, we get healed. Woah! Don’t we pray for people on a regular basis? Why don’t we get results like this? I haven’t got time to explore this as fully as I would like this morning but we do need to ask ourselves the question that if the Lord will heal and raise up people in the way suggested in these verses; what do they mean and how can we apply them to ourselves?

It helps to understand some of these words to see where they take us.

WHAT IS A PRAYER OFFERED IN FAITH? Firstly James mentions the prayer offered in faith. What is a prayer offered in faith? When we did Freedom in Christ a few months ago we looked at faith in these terms: Faith is simply believing what is already true. *Heb 11:1 To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see.* When we know something is true we base actions on it whether it feels true or not. One of the reasons why the sick call the elders of the church is that they should be the ones that walk closest to God and sense what the Spirit is calling them to do in praying for someone. In other words, prayer isn’t something we should be doing according to how we feel, but to as the Lord moves is moving us.

WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF HEALING? Secondly we need to catch a biblical view of sickness and healing. We see these through modern eyes where sickness is something that happens to you and you seek medical treatment because it’s a physical thing. But the Bible does not separate body mind and spirit. We are spiritual beings and sickness goes beyond whether our bodies are functioning properly or not into the field of all kinds of problem that being wrong in mind or spirit generates. Apart from a few notable examples in scripture to the contrary, the source of all human malady is sin, it’s what had brought death, it is what destroys our bodies, it destroys our mind, it destroys our relationship with God and we get sick and that manifests itself in poor health but in other things too such as compulsions, addictions, and-social behaviour, cheating, lying – they are all marks of the sickness that sin brings. Sin brings consequences. My sin doesn’t just hurt me, it hurts others, it is part of the sins of our society etc.

That’s why we are called to confess our sins to one another – because the first sign of healing is to recognise the cause of why so much is wrong with us, with our lives and with our society. We have to recognise sin, name it, confess it and stop the devil having a foothold because it’s there. And James makes it clear that we can only do that within the context of a praying community where we identify the problems and pray for one another recognising that the root is sin.

Thirdly we need to understand the nature of healing. I have an old car. It has had many problems with it over the years, so much so that we call it the BLUE LEMON. It's problems are the consequences of a number of factors. It's badly designed, the engine in particular is badly manufactured, the driver is a nut case! It's doomed to failure. How do we solve the problems. Well, to make the car useful, I ploughed lots of money in to it to keep it going and that was fine but in truth, the only solution actually is to get rid of it and replace it with something new. Until then, I can deal with some problems and others I just kind of have to leave because it isn't possible to do anything about it.

It's the same with human beings and God. When we sinned, we ruined our bodies and went out of tune with the planet and we also ruined our spirits and went out of our relationship with God. We're a sick and dying race. Yet God has brought healing through Christ. When Jesus died on the cross, sin was dealt with and when I came to faith in Him, my sin was dealt with – and yours if you know Jesus as saviour and Lord. All well and good and in Christ God brings healing. But there's a difference between healing and cure. God had healed me in Christ so I have an eternal relationship with Him, but I still live with the consequences of sin for as long as I walk around in this body. So healing is not a complete process at the moment but when I go to be with Him I know for eternity God is going to do what I should do with my blue car and get a replacement that isn't subject to sin and death.

DAVID MATTHEWS At a ministers meeting I went to my attention was drawn to what seemed first like a boast by the minister of a pentecostal church in Brentwood. In our church, he said we believe that the prayer in faith always makes the believer well. Mmm. Big claim. Yes, he continued, if they are sick we lay hands on them and pray, we anoint them with oil, we encourage them to be baptised and if they are not healed after all that, then we give them a good funeral and rejoice because by that point God has fully cured them! Do you get it? God only guarantees an absolute cure to those who have trusted Christ after they have died.

But God always brings the healing in our lives that we need in order to draw us to Him and to grow in Him. And when we examine our lives before Him, particularly with others, we find God gives us that ability to pray for one another in His Spirit such that we do know where the issues are and the areas that God wants us to pray into to bring healing.

This view of healing brings us nearer the realities of life.

LAZARUS- healing may be for a season – Lazarus

JONI God may leave us with a problem because that makes us reliant on Him – Joni

MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT God brings healing but not to the areas we think are important. We may be weak in body but strong in spirit. It's interesting but healing is often in the context of church. Whys that? Because to pray for someone means we need to be open to God to pray according to His purposes and if I don't have the answer and discernment, then God may well have raised up someone else for that purpose.

◆ Pray with authority

17 Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

WHAT MADE ELIJAH'S PRAYER POWERFUL AND EFFECTIVE The main "secret" as such to powerful and effective prayer can be found in one of the great examples of the OT. He prayed and it stopped raining and then he prayed and it rained. How come his prayer

was effective? Go to 1 Kings 18-20 and you'll see the answer – he was directed by God to do so. Here was a man who walked with God and knew His mind and will. And as a result his prayer were effective and powerful because he was in tune with God. HE WAS RIGHT WITH GOD

It seems to me that so often we “do” our faith the wrong way around. We have our fears, concerns, interests, passions and we find their aims beneficial and laudable. We know what we want to see and we pray earnestly for those things. “Lord, what can you do for me? Here’s my lists” And day after day, week after week He hears our petitions.

Turn this on its head. Elijah prayed because he knew the mind of God and as a result he could say “Lord, what can I do for you”. Out of that he got a much more interesting life! Prayer that is powerful and effective, that changes lives, that changes societies starts when the people of God come before Him. They come before Him as individuals and spend time with His word and in prayer. They come together as a church and they spend time with Him, worshipping Him, waiting on Him, listening for His word. Becoming Elijah who after all, was only one of us – listening for the lord’s voice.

I wouldn’t say that will turn us into perfect people or super-Christians – even Elijah got a crisis of faith – that’s why we have been given each other so that might not happen to us. The bottom line is, that if we want to have powerful and effective prayer, prayer that heals, prayer that deals with the issue of sin, prayer that brings hope, prayer that changes life – then we need to spend time with God – personally, collectively, worshipping Him, waiting on Him, listening to His word.

Are we going to spend time doing it? There is no alternative.

TITLE

*Preached by Mark Reid
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