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THE TRUTH ABOUT FAITH HEALING

26TH May 2024

Brothers, Sisters, Friends

Reading: Mark 16

Introduction

Our Bible Talk for March was taking a look about the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the truth about the rapture. There has been much false teaching that it has confused many people, and also caused the Truth to be ridiculed. Getting to the truth of the matter is not difficult, and shows that Bible teaching is consistent, rational, and believable. When man becomes inventive and tries to spice things up to get a following and inject new ideas, all of sudden the teaching becomes inconsistent – and rational people can see through it, but religion becomes tarnished and unbelievable. This is what has happened with the subject of faith healing. As we have many members in East Africa, and faith healing is very much a big subject over there, and indeed here in Dartford, just around the corner at the Winners Chapel in Green Street Green Road is a Pentecostal organisation who believe in modern day miracle healing, their headquarters in Nigeria have a Miracle Healing Service every Tuesday. They are not quite so loud about it here in the UK for what we will see are obvious reasons.

Summary

People in general perceive it as yet another aspect of crazy Christians who prefer to believe in fairy tales rather than facts. We hope to set the record straight and show the Bible teaching on this subject. What do people today mean by faith healing? The Catholic church has been practicing faith healing, for centuries, although they do not refer to it in the same terminology. The scriptural position is that faith can and does heal, but it does not require the intercession of a designated human healer, because the healer is God. Moreover, there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit gift of healing does not exist today despite the claims of many. It does not mean that God does not hear the prayers of the righteous, and if it is accordance with His will, answers the prayer to heal. The truth is, that faith heals in a much more important way than healing merely physical or mental sicknesses, but that it heals in a spiritual way, faith can save man from the curse of sin and death. We believe the emphasis should and must be on the latter, rather than the former.

Modern belief

Let's have a look then at the popular understanding of the term faith healing. Pentecostals, Evangelicals, Mormons, Spiritualists, and of course Catholics all believe in it. It is normally a ritual of prayer, a visit to a religious shrine and gestures such as laying on of hands, which results in divine intervention in spiritual and physical healing of disease and disabilities, can take place on stage to the background of music in front of a large crowd, or in a corner of a quiet church. There have been claims that faith can cure blindness, deafness, cancer, AIDS, developmental disorders, anaemia, arthritis, defective speech, multiple sclerosis, skin rashes, total body paralysis, and even

People can be physically healed supernaturally by God?

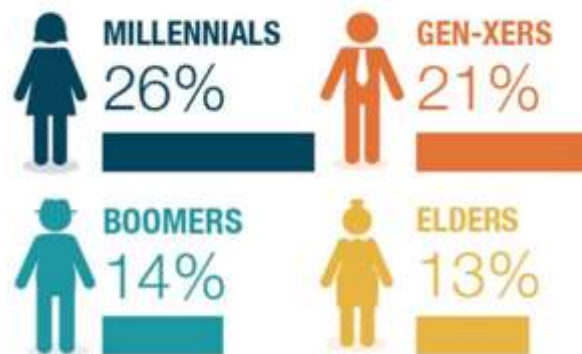
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ALL ADULTS



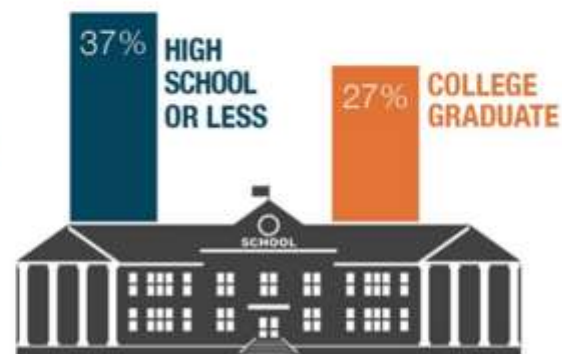
GENERATIONS

(% of those who disagree strongly)



EDUCATION

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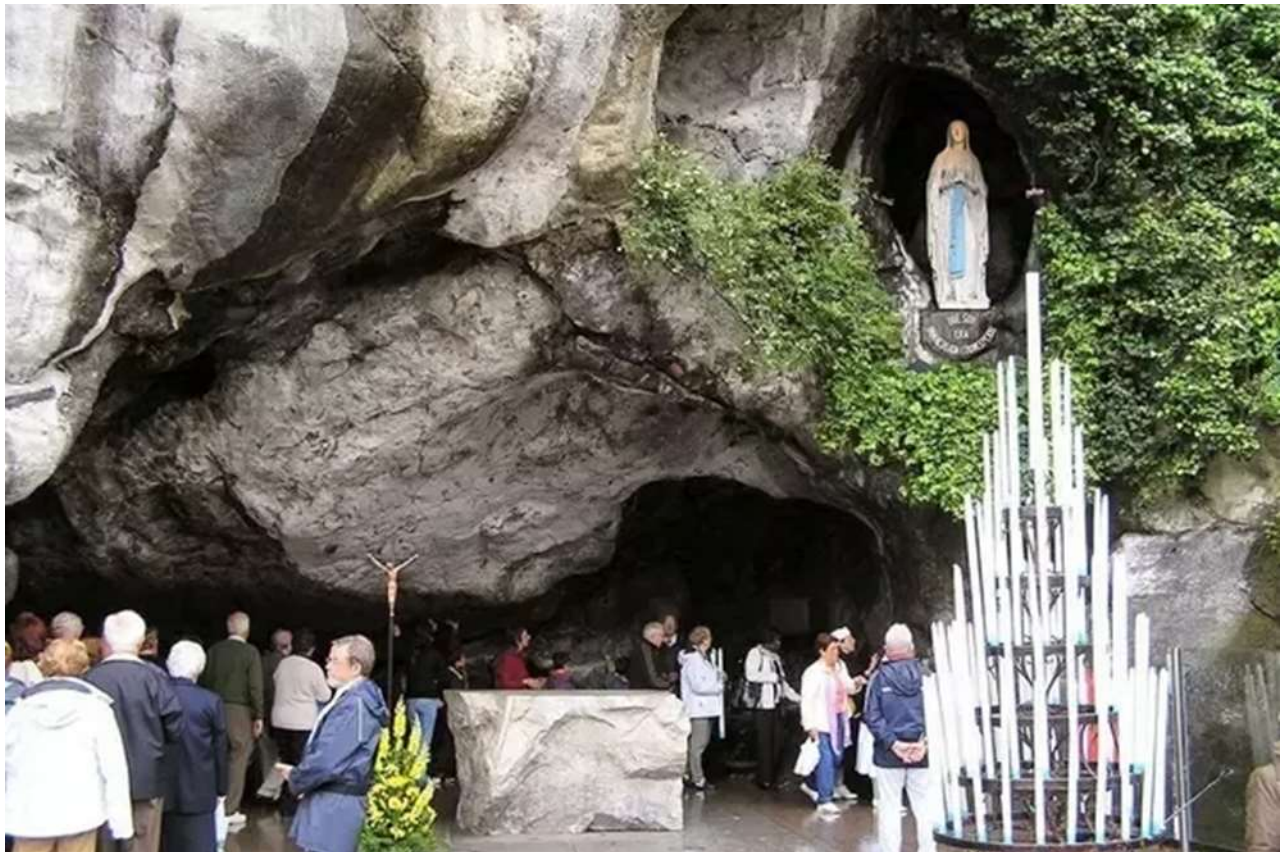


corns!! As you can see here in some countries this belief is so popular, that according to a 2016 survey it was 66% of the United States population.

Catholic Teaching

It is the Catholic church which has the oldest continual belief in faith healing. According to the United States Conference of Bishops, back in 2014 they stated that *healing can be interceded on behalf of the sick through the invocation of the name of the Lord Jesus, asking for healing through the power of the Holy Spirit, whether in the form of the sacramental laying on of hands and anointing with oil or of simple prayers for healing, which often include an appeal to the saints for their aid.* The Catholic position is difficult to tie down, for whereas the same conference rejects superstitious practices which are neither compatible with Christian teaching nor compatible with scientific evidence, it actively encourages prayers and worship, pilgrimages and payments to be made at various and many churches,

cathedrals, caves, grottoes and burial places of so-called venerated saints, in the hope of being healed. I myself went to Lourdes in 1992 to see what all the fuss was about, a place of pilgrimage, a shrine in the South of France. It was really sad seeing the endless line of



people in wheelchairs and crutches, waiting patiently in the hot sun, awaiting their turn to pray at the sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, and to know that despite being relieved of their cash, the same would go their way in a forlorn and empty belief of being healed. It is true there are crutches left behind, in the grotto, but it is noteworthy that there are no prosthetic limbs, or wheelchairs, no witnesses to paraplegics whose lost limbs were restored, despite the faithful meandering around the so-called stations of the cross, and pleas to St Jude, the Catholic patron saint of lost causes. As of 2004, the Catholic Church has said there have been 67 miracles and 7,000 unexplainable medical cures at Lourdes since 1858. Sadly there is no documented evidence of these statistics. But even today – why just

this past week we shared a news item whereby a 15 year old boy is about to be turned into a saint by the Pope because he managed to heal people.

Then there is the way in which so-called relics are supposed to have an ability to heal and cure, but always at a cost, making a large profit for the Roman Church in times past. Not just at these shrines, but at church, the sick were encouraged to make payments, and a huge amount of money collected from these donations. Prayers were made in front of relics, which included the supposed wood of the cross, tears of the Saviour, the blood of Jesus; one monastery in Jerusalem even offered for sale what was represented as the finger of the "Holy Ghost", and another monastery claimed to have a feather from the same source; in the twelfth century the shrine at Cologne claimed to have obtained the skulls of the wise men of the East. Relics have been effective in "curing" certain ailments even when it is known that the relics were counterfeit. For example the bones of "St." Rosalia, preserved in Palermo, Italy (a source of income for the Roman Church and town) for many centuries been found effective in curing diseases; but when examined by an anatomist, turned out to be goat bones. But to be fair, to this the world's largest religious organisation, according to Catholic Encyclopaedia, it is often said that cures at shrines and during Christian pilgrimages are mainly due to psychotherapy — due partly to confident trust in Divine providence, and partly to the strong desire of a cure. However there is no discouragement of donations given in the hope of healing, and indeed the miracles of healing are still used by popes to promote people to sainthood after their death. Of course none of this is scriptural. Saints means simply to be separated. Believers now are called saints, it is the gospel that

separates, it is God's place to choose people not the place of the Pope to make saints.

Pentecostal Teaching

With the Pentecostal Movement Faith Healing has been very much part of the attraction for huge congregations for many decades. Something they call the Great Revival, where they believe that there has been a latter day outpouring of the Holy Spirit gifts. At huge open-air crusades televangelists such as Pat Robertson, Benny Hinn, and Gerry Falwell all claimed to heal the sick. Of particular note is the group of so-called Christians who have followers across the world, called the Dead Raising Team. Or as they describe themselves as DRT! The group is run by a guy named Tyler Johnson, who believes that Matthew 10:8 – "*Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons*" – amounts to a "Christian job description" and should be taken literally. He claims to have brought 11 people back to life. He says he even persuaded the authorities in his state to issue him with an official photocard which lets him through police lines at car accident sites. Their aim is to see a DRT started in every city in the world, so that nobody could die without being prayed back to life. Johnson is unwilling to provide successful case studies. Not a great advertisement for the Pentecostal take on faith healing! What has happened as a result? For the tiny minority of people who claim to have been healed in this way, a huge majority have been come even more sceptical of the truth of the word of God. The overall affect is not glory to God, but rather a great disservice has been done to his name. In all of these considerations, one must ask who received the glory, the healer, the healed, or God? In the case of modern faith healing, just a quick perusal of faith healing at Pentecostal meetings on Youtube quickly shows who the glory is given to and it is not God. As a result, this movement has only

attracted much cynicism and ridicule. The American Cancer Society states "*available scientific evidence does not support claims that faith healing can actually cure physical ailments.*" "*Death, disability, and other unwanted outcomes have occurred when faith healing was elected instead of medical care for serious injuries or illnesses.* One review published in 1998 looked at 172 cases of deaths among children treated by faith healing instead of conventional methods. These researchers estimated that if conventional treatment had been given, the survival rate for most of these children would have been more than 90 percent, with the remainder of the children also having a good chance of survival. A study in the British Medical Journal investigated spiritual healing, therapeutic touch and faith healing. In a hundred cases that were investigated, no single case revealed that the healer's intervention alone resulted in any improvement or cure of a measurable organic disability. A group at Johns Hopkins University published a study in 2011 reporting no significant effects on pain, mood, health perceptions, illness but a small improvement in reported energy in a double-blind study to test the efficacy of spiritual exercise in chronically ill adults.

Confusion

What do we make of all of this? How do we reconcile the fact that Catholics who queue at Lourdes in their wheelchairs, and Pentecostals who queue in a line to go up on stage to the backdrop of rock music to be cured both claim to be healed by the power of the Holy Spirit? They both claim fundamentally opposing beliefs, but still expect the public at large to accept that the same Holy Spirit heals both? Surely both can't be right? It's not difficult to work out that there is a problem here. Is Christ Divided?, There is one Lord, one faith, one God and Father of all, and one Spirit, not two in opposition.. Or do they think that it is the same Holy Spirit? So why

the difference in faith? As both different denominations take the Bible as their foundation, is there an example of the Holy Spirit working through and supporting apostates in the New Testament? I think that both sides would say no. Let's go to the Bible then, and get some guidance to work out what we can make of this faith healing business. The Apostle Paul had this piece of advice: 2 Tim 3: 1. *This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. And verse 13. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.* The Apostle John similarly advised 1 John 4:1. *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.* And the Apostle Peter echoes a like warning: 2 Peter 2:1 *But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.* Thus it is right to be sceptical of any organisation, that despite carrying out so called miracles, such as faith healing, what teaching to they promote? They might well do such wonders and miracles in the name of Christ, but if the doctrines they hold onto, are not sound, are not the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, then they are false prophets, and to be ignored and it is a good indicator that the signs and wonders are not so wonderful after all, if the doctrine behind is suspect. Both denominations hold that God is a Trinity, that souls are immortal, and so on, other faith healers similarly hold to false doctrines.

A Different Example

When Jesus healed people, and when his disciples healed people, it was for the purpose of promoting the Gospel, it was for showing the authority, and authenticity of the Gospel. For modern so called Christians to claim the same powers, yet teach another doctrine

rapidly exposes their claims as being false. This is not a modern problem however: And the Apostles had good reason to give the warnings like they did: for even in their day, some falsely claimed miraculous powers in the name of Jesus Christ: for example: Acts 19: 11 -13 *And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.. Then certain of the travelling Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We sternly warn you by Jesus whom Paul preaches...* These particular Jews did this to promote themselves, not the Gospel and definitely not God. But what happened to them? The very disease they pretended to cast out infected them, and terrified them as they ran off embarrassed. Another example was a man who became jealous when the apostles came to town, and wanted the same power they had. But he was motivated by riches and not the glorification of god, offered them money Acts 8:19 *Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.* We would suggest that this advice be taken a little more frequently nowadays. Of course, Jesus knowing that there would be many pretenders and deceivers had this to say: Matt 7: 20-23: 20. *Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me,*

ye that work iniquity. And again in Matt 24: 24: For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. This is the warning given, and rightly so. There have always been false healers who prey on the suffering the vulnerable and the desperate in order to gain and increase in wealth dishonestly. Such behaviour is the worst kind of blasphemy, it is stealing from the poor, and sick, in the name of Christ, and because of the resultant disappointment, and the scepticism and outrage caused, turns away many from wanting even to read the Bible.

Jesus said to his disciples, who walked and travelled with him in Mark 16:17,18 *And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils, they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.* It is these verses which are quoted by Pentecostals in support of their belief. However we note that Jesus also said that not only would the disciples be able to cast out sicknesses but also that they would be able to speak in different multiple languages. To pick up snakes without being hurt, and even drink poison without being harmed, because it was the will of God that the Gospel would be preached to every creature under heaven and nothing would be allowed to get in the way. Large numbers of congregations offer testimony to confirm that God answers the prayers of the sick, but in practice they do not hesitate to seek medical care when seriously troubled. Whereas when Jesus or the disciples healed the sick when doctors couldn't, take the example of the woman with an issue of blood for 12 years, and had spent all her money on the physicians who couldn't cure her. The difference between how so-called faith healing is conducted today, and how the Lord Jesus and the apostles cured

people, is contrasted markedly in other ways as well: Many times Jesus commanded the healed not to tell anyone. It was a private matter, he shrank from the limelight. He did not approve of anyone asking for a sign just for the spectacle of it, describing such as coming from a "wicked and adulterous generation. Platforms, pulpits, and pope-mobiles were not Jesus style. Modern "faith-healers" cannot tell which of their patients will be healed and which will not. The miracles of the Lord Jesus and the Apostles were not subject to any such doubt. Additionally the power of the Holy Spirit recorded in the New Testament healed instantly. Peter's mother-in-law, the centurion's son, Jairus' daughter and the paralytic were all healed immediately. Another point, Jesus healed totally. Peter's mother-in-law was fully functional after being healed from an illness so severe she was bedridden, but when Jesus healed her, she rose immediately and prepared a meal for all who were in the house.

Jesus was able to fully restore missing parts of the body, unlike faith healers of today and the shrine at Lourdes, for example when he restored the ear of the high priest's servant which had been cut off. Jesus healed everyone they were not required to be pre-screened by the disciples before coming to Jesus for healing, as is the standard procedure with the healers today. Jesus healed all the time in many places, not in a studio with carefully-controlled circumstances. Lastly, Jesus healed actual organic diseases, not symptoms as the faith healers do. Jesus never healed anyone of a headache or back pain. He healed leprosy, blindness, and paralysis, miracles that were powerfully and obviously true, so that those in authority even acknowledged the situation. Hardly the case today where faith healers are regarded as fringe lunatics and crooks.

But why did Jesus heal the sick. Why did he give the power to his disciples to do the same? this power was given to Jesus, and in turn

the Apostles for one reason only, it was to show the authority by which they spoke. Returning to Mark 16 which Pentecostals like to quote, we note how Jesus said: 15. *And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.* We can see here clearly that the signs followed the preaching of the Word. The Word of God was and is the Holy Spirit. It was the God breathed, inspired, Jesus said the words *I speak they are spirit and they are life*. However, Jesus in fulfilling that Word, in being the living breathing Word of God in action, manifest in the flesh, it was tough and hard on a generation of Jews steeped in the law of Moses, to be told, look you don't need to worry about that anymore, all those laws and sacrifices, offerings, and rules which Moses wrote actually pointed to me, and now I am showing you what those rules were supposed to do, how to live a faithful and sinless life before God. In order to convince them of the truth of his teaching, the Holy Spirit was given without measure, in signs following. All Jesus words, and the words of the Apostles have been written down, again through the Divine inspiration, of the Apostles. The signs following are not necessary, as the word is here in black and white, which is provable testable, and liveable. As Paul pointed out in 1 Corinthians 13: 8. *Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.* These signs following will cease 9. *For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.* 10. *But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.* The message of God culminated in the delivery

of the last book, the revelation of Jesus Christ, what we have here is the more sure word of prophecy, the perfect will of God. The Holy Spirit gifts have long been withdrawn. When Jesus healed, always he said words to the effect Luke 17:18 to the Samaritan, *Go thy way Your faith has made you whole*, Luke 18:42 to the blind man, *Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee*. Mark 7:27-29 to the Phoenician woman *O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire*, to the centurion, Matt 8:13, *Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee*, we could go on, and on. Jesus did not heal for the sake of it but he was showing that when faith in God, and belief in the saving name of Jesus Christ is demonstrated, salvation is possible. Moreover Jesus many times instructed those healed, *go thy way, sin no more, or thy sins be forgiven thee*, often he showed the connection between the ailments of the flesh and greatest disease of all even sin. It is remarkable that faith healers rarely, if ever emphasis this. All sicknesses and illnesses are as a result of the curse of sin. Romans 8:22 *For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now*. It is because our nature is corrupt, our bodies are dying, from the instant we are given life, and are susceptible to further corruption, whether sin, sickness, illness, or disease. All functions of a cursed and dying nature. It is to this dying and sick race that Jesus has come. To people who think they are just fine, like Israel of old did, do not benefit from God's protective hand. Jesus in Mark 2:17 said, *They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*. Jesus is the only faith healer today. He is still able to heal, and to intercede on behalf of those praying for cures to their illnesses, sicknesses and sufferings. He is able to do this, because in all things we suffer, he has suffered likewise. He doesn't need to pretend or fake, because he knows our frame. Hebrews 2:10. *For it became him, for whom are all things,*

and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. He is then the true shepherd of the sheep, the true pastor, the Bishop, Apostle and High Priest. Jesus said I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no man can come unto the Father but by me..., there is no intercessor between God and man, except Jesus, furthermore Jesus said John 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. And again I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: As the great physician, Jesus still asks for faith, not through wonders and signs, they will follow, but in His Word. It is the Word of God which can cure us of all sins, by believing and being baptised, we will have hope of life everlasting. How did Jesus find the cure for the greatest of all diseases? He was given it, he is the cure. Because sin is the cause of the curse, he stopped sin in its tracks, in his head, he fought against deception, lies, fraud, pride, and dishonesty, and never allowed it to practise, but triumphed over it. In dying an innocent man, his blood was precious in the sight of God, and He would not suffer him to see corruption in the grave. In this way the power of sin and the curse of death was broken. All who follow him, and not the false teachers and liars of this world, are able to be joined to his life in baptism, and be covered by his sinless life, and be forgiven from their sins, the remedy to the greatest disease. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

Suffering in this life in the meantime does continue. Cancer, such a scourge nowadays. Probably because of all the junk we eat, and polluted air, plastics, and other debilitating illnesses we all suffer from... it is part of the curse, but the Apostle James reminds us: *James 5:14-16 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of*

the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. The power of prayer cannot be understated but note the conditions, prayer of a righteous man avails much. Draw your own conclusion from that statement. God does not hear the prayers of the unrepentant. The point is, Jesus said *ask and ye shall be given*. We should not be afraid to take it to the Lord in prayer, but realise that the time has not yet come for the victory over the curse. As mortals we need trials and tribulations to test us. The great Apostle Paul had a sickness and he prayed three times to God for it to be taken away. It wasn't. He accepted that God's will was that he should continue patiently regardless, he writes: 9. *God said to me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.* What a righteous and faithful example. It is this faith which we must display if we desire to be healed and to receive the promise of life eternal , as Jesus describes in *Revelation 21:3-4 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*

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