



Conducted by
James Gardiner

“ Could you please explain James 5:14-15: “ the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up,” in view of the claims by “ Faith Healing ” movements regarding this passage ? ”

IN this chapter of James’s epistle, he gives advice and instructions to those who were afflicted (suffering evil because they were Christ’s disciples); those who were merry; those sick; and those erring from the truth.

Those afflicted were to pray for strength to cope with and forgive their tormentors; those who were merry or happy were to sing. There is a tendency amongst men, when in a “ merry ” state, to drink and sing bawdy songs: James says Christ’s disciples should give expression to their joy by singing hymns to God’s praise.

Next, James gives instructions concerning the sick and this is the subject matter of our question. James’s injunction to the sick is that they should send, not for the best physician in the district, but for the elders of the local congregation. These elders were not physicians, of course, but were called in to heal the sick person miraculously. By the laying on of the apostles’ hands power to work miracles, wonders and signs could be passed on to other disciples and these supernatural gifts were bestowed liberally. In the early years of the church’s history God granted such gifts to His emissaries so that they might manifest proof of their heavenly mandate and also that they might *confirm the word of truth* (Mark 16:17-20; see also 1 Cor. chapters 12, 13

and 14, and Eph. 4:8-13). After God's word had been confirmed (and it only required one confirmation) the necessity for such miracles and signs ceased. Now we must believe, or reject, the written scriptures—walking by faith rather than by sight. The age of miracles has thus long since passed away, notwithstanding the strong claims to the contrary by various people, including faith healers.

Among the supernatural gifts bestowed was the amazing power to heal the bodily sick miraculously, and since the elders were amongst those who were recipients of such gifts, it is reasonable that they should be summoned in such cases. We notice that the elders (plural) were to be called (not a R.C. priest as the Roman Catholic Church interprets it to justify their rite of extreme unction). The elders with such gifts, therefore, were called to the sick bed, where they anointed the infirm person with oil. This anointing with oil served little purpose as a curative agent since the sick person was in any case healed miraculously. God could easily have cured the sick person without any prior anointing of oil, just as easily in fact as Jesus could have cured the blind man in John 9:6-7 without first applying clay to the blind man's eyes. The anointing with oil was probably intended as a sign to the sick person and to all onlookers that a miracle was about to be performed. This anointing of the sick with oil prior to their being healed was not something new but was practised by "the twelve" sent out under the "limited commission," prior altogether to the "great commission." The twelve also were given power to cast out devils, heal the sick and even raise the dead. Jesus' instructions to them (Matt. 10:8) were to "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give." Mark 6:13 says that "they [the twelve] anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them." Thus the twelve also anointed the sick with oil prior to healing them supernaturally. The anointing was to be done in the name of the Lord.

The elders were also required to pray over the sick person, and "the prayer of faith (v.15) shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up" (a phrase confirming the fact that physical bodily sickness is what the sick man is being saved from); his sins, additionally, are forgiven. Notice it is the *prayer* and not the oil which saves the sick. "Prayer of faith" means not just a prayer made in full assurance of an answer, or based on strong belief, but has reference to the miraculous gift of faith mentioned in 1 Cor. 12:9. "Shall save the sick"—no embarrassing failures which would require to be explained away, such as one might see today, but healing carrying the guarantee of God.

These miraculous healings in New Testament times were *instantaneous*, *supernatural* and, what is most important, *permanent*. These three features raise them into a sphere infinitely above the most successful of the struggling endeavours of any faith healer no matter how good his intentions might be. This is surely by far the most telling point in appraising the claims of "faith healers" today. I do not know enough about "faith healing" to be too critical of it, and I certainly have no desire to malign men whose only wish is to heal the sick. I suppose there are men who can induce, by whatever power, a change for the better in the chronically sick, but this result must not be compared to, or confused with, James 5 or any of the other miraculous healings of the New Testament (church) age. An invalid may be induced to totter from his wheelchair on the stage of some packed theatre in an atmosphere charged with emotion, sweat, tears and expectancy but most often the invalid must return home, sadly, in the wheelchair.

After long and earnest efforts by the best "faith healers" many, and probably all, of those suffering from the deadly and malignant diseases (cancers, etc.) pass on to death regardless. This surely illustrates the *present absence* of the mighty healing powers of God's servants in the early days of the church.

The charge that one is limiting God's power may be made but God alone can limit His own power, and very often has, and does. God can still, and does, restore the sick and, if He so chooses, He can save even the sick nigh unto death, else it would be futile to pray for the recovery of the sick. What man today, however, has the right,

power or authority to call upon God to instantly manifest a cure in the sick by employing "a prayer of faith" as in James 5? We can express our wish to God that a sick person may recover but we cannot invoke the terms of James 5:13-15 and expect God to fall in line, albeit we think we have great faith.

It is as well to remember that this gift of healing the sick, to be implemented by these elders, was not the *only* special gift given. Jesus said (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." These signs and wonders were to confirm the word. If the gift of healing the sick is still extant, by the same token so should the others be. Where are those today, then, who can speak with new tongues?; where is the man today who can cast out devils? Where is the man of such faith that he is prepared to drink a fatal dose of arsenic to prove God is with him? or is prepared to share a bed with a king cobra? Where are all such? Why are we left with but those who are prepared to lay hands on the sick? The answer is that all such gifts belonged to the age of miracles and are vested in man no longer, and this includes them all—the miraculous healing of the sick as well. If we are sick nowadays we don't call for the elders: we send for the best physician or surgeon in town and place our trust in them, at the same time asking our heavenly Father to afford us a blessing. I do hope these comments may be of some little assistance to the questioner.

(Please continue to send your questions to James R. Gardiner, 88 Davidson Terrace, Haddington, East Lothian, Scotland)

CAMEROONS EVANGELISATION FUND

Again a report in connection with the above work, and this time an appeal for financial assistance to the fund. I continue to have complete faith and confidence in the labours of Brother D. N. Elangwe and his co-labourers in the Cameroons. He is doing great work with the printing press and producing large quantities of gospel literature and tracts, which are, I may say, of sound scriptural content. Our brother has been trying to keep down running costs by printing bill-heads and odd jobs, but has found that this has been interfering with the supplying of the continual demands for the gospel literature. He has secured another smaller press which will produce the odd jobs, so that the larger press may produce the vital tracts and leaflets in an uninterrupted flow. But he is having difficulty in paying for this smaller machine, which is costing £185, of which I have sent £65. This virtually depletes the fund.

This is a fruitful endeavour and deserves our attention and help. In the Cameroons we have great opportunities: the people hearing the gospel for the first time are very interested and the churches around Kumba are growing. Bro. Elangwe

and others are not sparing themselves in trying to reach many in the villages with the gospel, preached in the open and by the printed page.

I am sure that if we do not reach them with the true gospel, the others (Globals, Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, etc.) will reach them with their false doctrines. I appeal therefore again to all the brethren to remember this work in their prayers; and perhaps at the next business meeting of their congregations they will remember also this fund and its urgent need, and send a contribution, however small. Every penny will be well spent. I thank those who have contributed regularly in the past and know that they will be happy in the knowledge that souls are being won in the Cameroons indirectly but very definitely as a result of their interest and who have not yet participated in this work financial contributions. I hope that some, will join us in this worthy endeavour.

Please send what you can spare to James R. Gardiner, 88 Davidson Terrace, Haddington, East Lothian, Scotland.

The article, Churches of Christ, printed on the centre pages may be used as a pamphlet by readers who care to extract it.—Editor.