

Maumee Watershed District Lent 2018 'Faithful to the End' #2
"Faithful to Heal"

Psalm 103:2-5 Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

There is an incredible miracle that happens in Israel's journey to the Promised Land. By the way, you and I are also on a journey to the Promised Land. They come out of Egypt where they have been slaves for Pharaoh. Moses leads them to the Red Sea, Pharaoh's armies try to follow; but God parts the Sea – they move through on dry land, a wall of water on either side, and when the Egyptians try to follow, the waters crash in on them. Israel is free! By the way this is our story; you and I have been provided a way of freedom from our past.

Now they are on the other side, free but defenseless. They come to a place called Marah – there is water there, but it is polluted, poisoned. 'Marah' means bitter, polluted. Think of how defenseless we can be at times and how bitter life can be here. They were in the desert without water for three days.

Every time I read the term 'three days' I think of Jesus, dead and in the empty tomb for three days. Remember that when you read. The people cried out against Moses and against God. 'We're thirsty, we're going to die!' And the Lord showed Moses a tree, and Moses threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. The people drank, the people were free, the people lived.

What do you do with three days and a tree? Could this be a preview of what is to come? Three days – Jesus dead and in the tomb. The people of God were as good as dead three days in the desert. A tree - the means of making the bitter water sweet. The Cross of Jesus - the means of making our bitter life sweet. And His grace, poured out like water on a thankless people who cried out against Moses and God just after the greatest miracle of freedom and salvation. Can you see the connections?

The people drink the water – waters of Grace. God calls them into a covenant relationship. Follow me – I will take care of you. Then God gives His promise, which is always the source of Grace – I am *Jehovah Rappah*, the Lord your healer. Last week we talked about how the Hebrews gave God many names. Jehovah means God and then the adverb to describe God's – Rappah – your healer (Exodus 15:22-26). What is God saying? One of my purposes is to heal. I will be faithful to heal my people.

We are traveling through this season of Lent, leading us to Easter. We want to see how God is 'Faithful to the End'. Today I want to try to explore God's healing. Is God really faithful to heal, or is it an irrelevant concept from long ago, or is it just reserved for certain folks today?

1. Jesus heals. One of Jesus' signature traits was to make others better – physically, spiritually and emotionally.

When He started ministry Jesus preached in the synagogue of His home town and these were His opening remarks, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.*" And he began to say to them, "*Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing*" (Luke 4:18-21). What is Jesus saying? 'One of My purposes is to heal. I will be faithful to heal My people.'

As Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion (Roman soldier commanding at least 100 soldiers, sometimes more) came forward to him, begging him, "*Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, in terrible distress.*" And Jesus said to him, "*I will come and heal him.*" But the centurion answered him, "*Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it.*" When Jesus heard him, he marveled, and said to those who followed him, "*Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith*" (Matthew 8:5-10).

What is this about? The army commander has faith that when he gave an order it was going to be followed. That's the way it is in the military. He had faith in the military system; he had faith his soldiers would obey his authority. This commander is now saying he has faith in God's authority. If Jesus, who he believes has the authority to heal, gives the command, it's going to happen. And it does; the servant is instantaneously healed!

2. Kinds of Healing Oftentimes we believe in only one kind of healing, but I believe there are many. First -

The Miraculous. This is what we most pray for – 'Save my loved from cancer! Make him love me again. Lord, I need this!' God still does miracles today. I have been to the hospital to pray for people having surgery. The tumor has to come out or they are going to die. I have seen the surgeon come out and shake his head – 'I saw it on the scan yesterday, it's not there now.' What happened? A miracle; an unexplainable happening interrupting the laws of nature - attributed to the authority and power of God.

Some are healed by what we would call ***Medical Science.*** Prescriptions, surgeries, radiation or chemotherapy - all acts contributing to the healing process. I believe God comes in the medicine, the surgeon, the radiation to heal. Some denominations don't believe in medical help. They believe it is an act of faithlessness – that the only healing is miraculous. We have heard of some parents who won't get medical help for their children because of how they believe. Then a big stir happens in the news, the courts sometimes get involved. I believe God is God in medicine and science. He is the great physician and the great scientist. Then -

Death and Resurrection. God heals. 'Why didn't God answer our prayers? Why did our loved one die? I thought He loved us. Where was God?' He was there, He heard, He acted. Everyone dies. Jesus died. But the power of death is broken, the sting of loss is no more through His resurrection. He is alive and promises those who have faith, those who believe, they too will be alive.

I prayed for my mom to have a few more good years with my dad and our family. She did. Dad wanted them to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary. She only made it to 59 1/2. But God healed my mom. Maybe not the way we wanted or in the timing we wanted, but God healed her. Today, I believe she has a brand new body that never hurts or dies again. I believe we will see each other again in the great Kingdom of Heaven. I believe she is happy. The one who makes this possible is our God who is faithful to His children. If I ever believed the resurrection was some kind of hoax, I would burn every Bible I could get my hands on, I would preach on every act of selfishness and humanism – all against God. But I can't because I believe Jesus Christ lived, died - willingly on the Cross, and rose again. Because He lives we shall live as well. Let me say a word about-

3. Praying – God responds to our prayers because praying is an act of our faith in His faithfulness.

The Bible says, *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is any among you sick? 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 will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects* (James 5:13-16).

We work at prayer. It is consistent, powerful, a necessity of life. Prayer is work – carving out that time, being dedicated to talking and listening to the Lord. That shows our faithfulness and it also says we believe God is faithful to us.

I think of those men whose friend was paralyzed; how they must have prayed. Jesus showed up in their home town and they carried their friend on his bed to the house Jesus was in. When they arrived there was no room, it was packed out. But they would not give up. They carried him up on the roof, bed and all, and removed some of the roof and lowered him down in front of Jesus. And seeing their faith (I would say, seeing their faith in God's faithfulness to heal their friend) Jesus healed him instantly (Mark 2).

Prayer is work. It is daily, hourly, constantly. It is expressing our faith in His constant and ongoing faithfulness to our every need.

At hospitals I have prayed for friends and church friends. I have often pray before surgery – 'Lord, as you came to a little village on the Sea of Galilee and people brought their sick friends to You for healing, we bring our friend and loved one. As You healed them, we ask for you to heal ours. May the hands of the surgeon, the anesthesiologists, the nurses – may their hands become Your hands. Heal this one we love.' Jesus does in his way.

Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, *Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us, **that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph**, as it did among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men; for not all have faithful the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from evil* (2 Thessalonians 3:1-3). Isn't that a great verse! Pray for us that the Word of God can speedily triumph. The Lord is so faithful.! That is enough right there to pray for a lifetime! Then –

4. Hidden Wounds Okay – you say, ‘Scot I don’t have cancer, no surgery scars, I have all my limbs, I’m even in my right mind, I look fine. But I have these hidden wounds; I have scars on my heart. You can’t see them, I can’t see them, but I know they are there. They hurt so much, I tell people I am fine, I smile, but I am not fine.’ What is this about? Abuse, divorce, neglect, lies told, mental anguish, and so much more. You want to know, ‘Can God heal that?’ I say, absolutely. Jehovah Rapah can heal us, but we must be willing. How does it happen?

The Bible says, *I was dumb and silent, I held my peace to no avail; my distress grew worse, my heart became hot within me. As I mused, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue: "Lord, let me know my end, and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is!"* (Psalms 39:2-4).

What does this mean? The longer we hold it in the longer we suffer. Bring it out and let Jesus deal with it. *He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds* (Psalms 147:3). I Am Jehovah Rapah, the Lord your healer. **Jesus can see our hidden wounds just as well as our outer ones.** He cares just as much about our inner wounds as our outer ones. He can heal us inside and out.

I am praying regularly for a friend who is suffering with cancer. Chemo, radiation, severe pain, lost all her hair, miserable. But miraculously she counts it a privilege to suffer with Jesus. But she would tell you cancer is not her biggest enemy, but her hidden wounds.

She wrote to me and told me how as a young girl she hated going to the family farm. Where most children would love it she hated it. Why? It was here her grandfather would come at night, get into bed with her, hold his hand to her mouth and sexually abuse her. It went on four long years. What’s worse is she told her parents but they took her there anyway. Now she has a beautiful smile and on the outside one would never know – but inside she is dying. She feels betrayed, unprotected, devastated, she has wanted her grandfather to die – yet she holds onto Christ as her only hope.

She writes - My problem became how to not allow it to run my entire life. I prayed, a lot. I talked to God constantly and asked for peace instead of anger. It did not come. Not for a long time. There were years of reading, praying and faithfully trying to move forward. It was not easy and I was not sure if I would ever truly forgive them. The thoughts were there but the actions had yet to come. I struggled with that so much as I wanted to forgive. I knew God wanted this from me, but I just did not know how to make it happen.

I was given the chance on the day that I arrived at the funeral home. My grandfather had died. I arrived at the funeral home before my family. I was alone and trying to pull myself together; I had no idea what my reactions were going to be. The funeral director said I could go in, that ‘my grandfather looked great and how great a man he was.’ He gave me his condolences and walked away. I walked into the room across the hall and there in the corner was my grandfather in his casket. I stood there, unable to move my body. Then, God came - again. I was lifted up and placed right next to my grandfather. I stared at him, at death. Then I started to cry. At that moment, forgiveness flooded my soul and spilled out onto a man who I had hated for so long. It was not a huge show of forgiveness, it was a simply put ‘I forgive you’ as I leaned over his ear. It was pure, honest and necessary in my life.

The scripture says, *Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you* (Ephesians 4: 32). Christ is working in her, healing her hidden wounds. I pray He will also heal her cancer.

May you know He heals. It is Jesus' nature to heal. Sometimes in a miracle, sometimes in medical science, sometimes in death and resurrection. Pray hard, work at it. God loves you and comes – physically, emotionally, spiritually. He is Jehovah Rapah – the Lord who heals us. May your life be renewed, healed, strengthened. He is the Lord who is faithful to the end.