

# HEALING AND DELIVERANCE

## Could You Not Watch With Me One Hour?

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This month's sermon theme is, "Healing and Deliverance—Praying the Really BIG Prayers." This topic is essentially Christian, because Jesus Christ *"went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil"* (Acts 10:38). Furthermore, He told His disciples, *"These signs will follow those who believe in My name, they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover"* (Mark 16:17-18). And this theme is especially Pentecostal, because we believe the Holy Spirit is still active today in these Biblical ways.

A portion of the Christian world are known as Cessationists, because they believe that the Holy Spirit's miraculous activities (except for saving sinners) ceased after the first century. It is their contention that divine miracles were given primarily to attest to the truthfulness of the Gospel message as it was being developed and recorded, and once the New Testament texts were completed, those miracles ceased. Generally, they label contemporary miracles as demonic counterfeits.

Needless to say, the Assemblies of God is not in the Cessationist camp. The miracle of divine healing in answer to believing prayer is one of four cardinal doctrines—a pillar of our faith in Jesus.

Our theme Scripture for this series is Acts 10:38:

*You know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.*

Several questions commonly swirl around the theme of divine healing, and we will consider them briefly.

### **Does God ALWAYS Heal Or Deliver?**

Some will answer, yes (at least theoretically), but pragmatically, we must all agree that everyone who asks God to heal them does not get what they asked for.

We firmly believe that God always CAN. He has the power and authority to heal—anyone, any-time. He has demonstrated it through Jesus Christ, who occasionally "healed them all."

God also has the power and authority to create—something out of nothing—but we don't catch Him doing that much these days. My point is simply this: God's power and authority do not dictate His daily activities. In His sovereign insight, understanding, and loving purpose, He ALWAYS has the right to choose, to do things His way—even if we cannot understand His choices.

MY faith is sometimes a factor. YOUR faith is sometimes a factor. God's sovereignty is always the *deciding* factor.

Occasionally, Jesus is recorded to have healed everyone who came or was brought to Him (He has the power to do so). But, according to the inspired record, He did not heal everyone, everywhere—then, or now. He once visited a hospital (such as it was in those days) and selectively healed only one man, and then left.

I don't think we will ever reach a conclusion that will satisfy everyone any time, or anyone every time. So, at least for today, let's give that perpetual question a rest, trusting in God's superior wisdom and love for us all.

## **Teach Us To Pray**

Today, let's turn our attention to something that WE can do something about: How we pray.

This month I'm going to speak with you about

- Healing the land
- Casting out demons
- The power of the blood

But before we can pray the really BIG prayers for miraculous healing and deliverance of others, we need to learn to pray effectively for ourselves. That's not to imply that we must be perfectly whole before we can bring wholeness to others (if that were the case, there would be far less praying for others!), but there are some issues which must be dealt with first. These are often overlooked. But without them, most of our prayers for others will have little effect.

Let me explain that I am persuaded that God can use ANYONE, anytime—He once spoke intelligible words through a donkey. But if you hope to be used by Him regularly, you need to give attention to what I have to say today. It's the little things that add up to big things.

These personal matters are, in fact, the weightier issues—by which I mean that God presses us more about our personal stuff than He does about other people. That's usually why we try to skirt these issues, because they challenge us personally.

Rather than deal with our own stuff, many want to get right to the work of healing others, without realizing how much their own brokenness impacts their actions, and may impact those they “minister” to. I am going to challenge that kind of behavior.

*“First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye” (Luke 6:42).*

Let’s begin with just how difficult it is to pray faithfully.

### **Could You Not Watch With Me One Hour?**

Today’s topic always reminds me of an old spiritual song, “Every Time I Feel the Spirit.” Why? Because many people only think to pray “when they feel the Spirit.” This is a bad habit. This habit creates one of two results: 1) little praying, because most of our waking and sleeping minutes are not overwhelmed by that feeling, or 2) religious impact-chasers—people who run from one meeting to another seeking that next spiritual touch (perhaps they imagine that just one more good dose will nudge them over the hurdle to a perpetual high).

Let’s read the Bible story associated with this question (Matthew 26:36-46):

*<sup>36</sup> Then Jesus went with them to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and he said, “Sit here while I go over there to pray.” <sup>37</sup> He took Peter and Zebedee’s two sons, James and John, and he became anguished and distressed. <sup>38</sup> He told them, “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”*

*<sup>39</sup> He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, “My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”*

*<sup>40</sup> Then he returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, “Couldn’t you watch with me even one hour? <sup>41</sup> Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!”*

*<sup>42</sup> Then Jesus left them a second time and prayed, “My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done.” <sup>43</sup> When he returned to them again, he found them sleeping, for they couldn’t keep their eyes open.*

*<sup>44</sup> So he went to pray a third time, saying the same things again. <sup>45</sup> Then he came to the disciples and said, “Go ahead and sleep. Have your rest. But look—the time has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. <sup>46</sup> Up, let’s be going. Look, my betrayer is here!”*

The key portion is in verses 40 and 41:

*“Couldn’t you watch with me even one hour? <sup>41</sup> Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!”*

There are three dimensions in which God touches and transforms each of our lives:

- Salvation (initial healing of the heart/spirit)
- Soul renewal (breaking strongholds, recovering from carnal thinking)
- Physical healing (only temporal, but palpable and visible)

Jesus was in trouble. He was facing something so gruesome and disturbing that we cannot hope to understand it. And He needed the support of His friends. I suppose this is the maximum test of friendship—to stand by when you cannot fully understand the test and are helpless to make a difference.

His friends failed Him. Their eyes were so heavy, they could not pray; they could only sleep through His grief. Before the night was over, they had all fled and left Him alone.

His question was filled with incredulity and pity for His friends. Ever the Teacher, He explained why prayer was so necessary for them—and for us—*“so that you will not give in to temptation.”*

When Jesus said, *“The spirit is willing, but the body is weak!”* He identified our most common and persistent battleground: the struggle between flesh and spirit for mastery of the moment.

And what He revealed in the larger quote is that the battle is not won in that moment, but in the time leading up to that moment. How you spend your time *prior to* a temptation arising or presenting itself determines how that battle will go. If you are prepared—full of the Word and of the Spirit, trusting in the Father’s love and the Savior’s grace—your prayer will be different and the outcome will be different, than if a calamity triggers an emergency prayer to God (“if You’re out there”).

We (and most of the developed world) have become a culture of slaves—slaves to the immediate moment. We have heard phrases like, “Live for the moment!” so often that it seems like truth to us. Yet, that is not a maxim taught in the Bible.

If you are a child of the Kingdom of God, you must live *IN* the moment, but never *FOR* the moment! Our purpose is higher than that. Our viewpoint is much longer than this moment. For this moment is the result of many past moments, and it is a stepping stone to many more moments to come. Time and space are found under the canopy of eternity. This moment has been shaped by, and shaped for, eternity. *YOU* have been shaped by, and for, eternity. And we must live *this* moment in light of what we know of eternity—from eternal values (God’s values).

Praying is how Jesus taught us to do that—praying before the temptation arises (building up reserve grace), and praying in the face of temptation (accessing those reserves). Prayer is a shield against temptation (or, an escape hatch, if you find yourself in the middle of it). Whenever we face temptation, we are to try to overcome it—because Jesus overcame it before us, and He gives us all that we need to overcome it after Him.

Repeated, faithful prayer is a means of grace (storing it up for the future). However, if you have not saved for the future, it will not be possible to draw on your savings; or, if you have only saved a little, there may not be enough to get you through.

If you want to be effective in praying for the healing and deliverance of others, you need to do your part—you need to build up a significant reserve of grace. You cannot neglect personal, spiritual disciplines (like regular times of prayer) and expect to have power from God in the heat of a crisis.

So, before we tackle the really BIG prayers, let's work on this: tackle the really BIG sluggishness in your flesh (that part of you that repeatedly puts off praying and finds excuses—even really good ones—for not keeping Jesus and the Church at the center of your daily life).

My challenge to you today is simple: *add 5 minutes of undisturbed prayer to your daily calendar*. There are 288 five-minute periods in every single day. Will you dedicate one of them to Jesus Christ—to build up reserve grace and prepare yourself to meet the next temptation successfully?

If you don't now pray EVERY day, make up your sanctified mind to pray for 5 minutes EVERY day. (The earlier in the day, the better. Try to do it before you begin your daily routine, because once that starts, it's harder to take time out.)

If you already pray each day, determine to add 5 minutes more—just to build up reserve grace for future temptations. They will come. Jesus said, *“Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). We can meet them with courage, because Jesus did, and we can overcome them, if we lean on Him.

Let's pray.