

UPWARD CALL

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God

IN KING JESUS.

(Philippians 3:13-14)

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Make Ready the Way of the Lord

When John the Baptist and Jesus appeared on the stage of world history around 29 AD, they went about Judea preaching, *the kingdom of the heavens is at hand*. This was good news for all that had an ear to hear and that were looking for the promised coming of Messiah. He was in their midst, and it was time to change their thinking.

From that time on Jesus began to be repeatedly making loud public proclamations (performing as a herald), and to be continually saying, "You folks be progressively changing your thinking (change your frame of mind, mode of thought, perceptions and understanding and turn your focus to [Yahweh]), because the reign (or: kingdom) of the heavens has drawn near and now continues being at hand (close enough to touch)." (Matthew 4:17 JM-NT)

As Jesus went throughout Judea, He proclaimed the kingdom or reign of the heavens and healed every type of disease and illness among the people.

Later, Jesus continued leading [them] around (or: about) within [the] whole of Galilee, continuously teaching within their synagogues and repeatedly making loud public proclamations about the good news (the message of ease and wellness) which pertains to the Kingdom (or: which has its source in the Reign; which characterizes and belongs to the Kingdom; which is the Reign; or: the kingdom's glad tidings) – as well as continuing in curing every chronic disease and every occasional illness (sickness; delicate condition) among the people. (Matthew 4:23 JM-NT)

After Jesus' departure, His disciples went about doing the same. We could say that the people not only had physical infirmities but also spiritual infirmities.

Now Philip, upon going down into the city of Samaria, continued publicly proclaiming to them the Christ (the Anointed One). And the crowds, with one accord and like passion, continued attentively holding to [themselves and their minds] the things being progressively spoken by Philip, at hearing them and repeatedly seeing (looking at; observing) the signs which he kept on doing (or: performing). You see, many of the folks habitually having unclean breath-effects (spirits; attitudes) kept on crying out, then shouting for joy, with a loud voice, [as] they [i.e., the spirits], one after another, were coming (or: going) out. Now many folks – being people having been paralyzed, as well as lame ones – were cured and healed. So, much joy was birthed (came to be) within that city. (Acts 8:5-8 JM-NT)

There were two things going on in that day: The Kingdom was being proclaimed, and the people were being healed of all sorts of infirmities, in fulfillment of prophecy. Healing accompanied the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom and of Christ as a sign that this was the real deal. The Anointed One—the king and His kingdom—had arrived. It was only natural that the infirm flocked to Jesus and the others because they wanted to be set free from their infirmities.

When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet [Isaiah 53:4]: "HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES" (Matthew 8:16-17). Later, Peter picked up this truth. *He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed* (1 Peter 2:24). Through the voice of the prophets, the Judahites were to know when Messiah was on the scene, and healing was given to the people to prove that He and His kingdom had arrived.

Obviously, a great deal of theological teaching has come out of these verses, but cutting all that away, the message is clear: *Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29)! Infirmities are carried by sin and death, but the good news is that Jesus has dealt with it all.

But there was something else going on in that day. When Jesus arrived in the midst of the Jews of Judea, they were spiritually sick. Isaiah prophesied: *The whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it* (Isaiah 1:5-6). Later, the Lord commanded Isaiah: *Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.' Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed* (Isaiah 6:9-10). Jesus Himself declared that the prophecy of Isaiah was being fulfilled in that day. *You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; you will keep on seeing, but not perceive* (Matthew 13:14). The point is that the Jewish nation was spiritually sick and the nation needed spiritual healing, and the sign of this was manifested in the physical healings that took place in that day. The natural first, then the spiritual! Unfortunately, the nation missed the whole purpose and the kingdom was taken from them (Matthew 21:43).

In our day, are we much different, whether we look at the nations of the world or the church-at-large in the world? Sickness in the Lord's people appears on par with the world, as if the harmful diseases of Egypt are upon us, just as they are upon the world, the antitype of Egypt (Deuteronomy 7:15).

For this reason, people really are not much different today than they were 2,000 years ago. No one wants to remain sick, so they flock to so-called *healing ministries* and conferences in hope of hitting the jackpot, so to speak. Is there not a greater advantage in our day? After all, the kingdom and Christ reside within the people of God, and both Christ and His kingdom are proclaimed, at least in some measure and intensity among various groups. Why doesn't this automatically result in healing of all? The cessationists have no problem with this apparent lack, but it presents a particular problem for the continuationists, for, at best, they only see partial results, and some of these are questionable or temporary, meaning the infirmity comes back.

What if behind all the infirmities and lack of continual healings is the present spiritual condition of the church-at-large? What if we have the same infirmities on us as the world does because we are not any different than the world? What if we are spiritually sick as the second advent of our Lord is on the horizon, just as Judah was spiritually sick as the first advent of the Lord was on their horizon? What if the church is running after all sorts of flesh and pretending it is spirit? What if the church has more natural vision than spiritual vision? What if the church is in denial over its true condition? For the church in America, what if the condition of America, which has lost her way, especially on the political front, is a reflection of the condition of the church? What if the church has lost sight of the good news? There are many more questions that could be asked. I offer no answer to these questions, although I do have opinions, and you probably can guess some of them. I leave it for you to discern.

To repeat what I wrote elsewhere: **We need to judge the body properly.**

The good news is that healing is coming on an order that this sin-ravaged world has never seen before; we can be assured of this. But it isn't going to come through a people that look like the world. It will come when King Jesus comes with His many resurrected and transfigured sons of glory—the first fruits of humanity that are fully conformed to His image—immortal, spiritual, celestial, and glorified. In that glorious day, the kingdom of Christ will be manifested on the earth, and the nations will be healed through His kings and priests. ***Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight*** (Matthew 3:3; Luke 3:4). It is time to change our thinking.

On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:2 NASB)