

Text: Heb. 12:12-17

Title: "Hear the command to be healed"

Time: 7/10/2016 am

Place: NBBC

Intro - Imagine what it would have been like to hear Jesus utter a command to be healed physically. We have some sick church members whom we wish could hear such a command from the lips of the Savior. Some of the purest scenes of unmitigated joy come from the lives of those who just heard this kind of command and then experienced that kind of healing. One example of such a case is the woman who for 18 years was bowed over, not able to straighten herself up (Luke 13:10-13). As we think of the sick we know this morning, wouldn't it be nice to hear the Lord say about their body, "Woman, thou art loosed from thy infirmity." That would be cause for great joy and God's glory.

Well, it turns out that in a spiritual sense we have in our passage an equally powerful command to be healed that each of us can hear as the Word of God right now if only we will listen. Luke 13:13 said of the woman, "and immediately she was made straight." That verb, *to be made straight*, is in the first verse of our passage (v. 12, *lift up the hands* is literally *make straight again*). The picture here is that in a spiritual sense our hands can become handicapped or deformed, kind of like the woman's back of Luke 13, and we need the Lord to command that they be healed again.

The idea of *feeble* knees comes from the word behind our word *paralysis*. The idea is that the knees have become paralyzed, and they too need to be made straight. So verse 12 is a healing command from the lips of our Savior. It heals us spiritually, not physically. When the faithfulness of our hands have become deformed with unfaithfulness, and

when the faithfulness of our knees have become paralyzed by sin, God issues this command to heal us.

As wonderful as it would be to hear a command from the Lord that heals our body, it is far more wonderful to hear a command from Him that heals our spirit. Our bodies will never be completely healed until they are resurrected. The body of the lady healed in Luke 13 eventually became sick again and died. But when God issues a command to heal our spirits from sin and unfaithfulness, that healing can bring us a complete victory because our spirits are already redeemed in a way that our bodies are not yet. It is a wonderful thing to be in possession of a command to be healed spiritually from the Word of God, to which we can come over and over again.

The only remaining question is, "Will we listen; will we hear?" Notice with me this morning two things about hearing God's command to be healed.

I. We must hear the prescription in the command to be healed (vv. 13-16a).

Ill: We had prayed for Christina Wikman who had a serious infection from a tick bite not long ago. It was wonderful to see her functioning very normally during a 4th of July fellowship last Monday. The reason she has felt so much better is that she obtained a prescription for the right medicine for her condition, and the medications have been effective.

Appl: When our lives are infected with the deformity of disobedience and the paralysis of unconfessed sin and idolatry, we need a powerful prescription that tells us about the right kind of medication for our condition. Four medicines for such a condition are mentioned our passage:

1. God-designed grace (v. 15a, "lest any man fail of the grace of God"). *Grace* is the freely offered and faithfully given gift of God to meet the undeserving sinner's need. Spiritual paralysis is caused by a deficiency of God's grace in the life. The word *fail* is a present participle, so it carries the idea that this can become an ongoing and persistent condition. The person described by these words has for too long endeavored to be a Christian without the proper role of God's grace in the life. He is failing persistently away from the help of God's grace.

In Hebrews God's grace is what caused Christ to taste death for every man (2:9); grace is the character and offering of God's throne in answer to our prayers in times of need (4:16); grace is a quality of God's Spirit (10:29); grace is the power by which we serve and worship God (12:28); grace is the power that establishes our hearts (13:9); and grace is the final wish of our author to his readers (13:25, "Grace be with you all. Amen").

Of these passages, the one that tells us how to experience the power of this grace is 4:16, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." The prayerless life will suffer from a deficiency of God's grace. The prayerless marriage will. The prayerless home will. The prayerless church family will. And the prayerless nation will. Has the failure of your prayer life left you graceless and paralyzed in the Lord's will for your life?

2. God-designed paths (vv. 13-14). The Bible has a lot to say about straight paths and careful feet. Prov. 4:25-27, "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the paths of thy feet, and let all thy

ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.”

The word for *paths* in our Hebrews passage is actually a *wagon-wheel track*. So the foot path envisioned is a well-worn pathway, smooth enough for wagons to travel. Proverbs says that we use our eyes before we make a decision, and we use our feet after the decision is made. So when our author says, “Make straight, smooth, habitual paths for your feet,” he means, “Make it a habit to make good decisions with careful convictions based on sound principles that will result in a blessed life.”

The two key principles related to these straight paths are listed in v. 14 – peace with men and holiness before God. Of these two, holiness is the more important because you need that to see the Lord in His kingdom someday. Remember the description of that future in Isaiah 35:8? “And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.” Only what is holy may see that place and the Lord of that place someday. For this reason Christ died, the holy for the unholy, so that with His holiness we might see God in heaven someday. “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit,” (1 Pet. 3:18). Has God made you holy in Christ? Have you trusted Him for salvation from sin?

For the believer spiritual paralysis is caused by either a lack of peace with men or a lack of holiness before God. We must correct this condition through forgiveness and confession.

3. God-designed oversight (vv. 15-16a; *looking diligently* is *episcopeo*, the verb that is related to the noun meaning *bishop* or *overseer*). Westcott: "The word . . . expresses the careful regard of those who occupy a position of responsibility (as a physician, or a superintendent). Each Christian shares in this in due degree" (p. 406). As your pastor I have been called to the office of overseer. But each of us as believers has been commissioned to the function of oversight.

We are to ensure that no one fails away from God's grace (v. 15a), and so we must make sure that we minister God's grace to others, especially in the use of our tongue (Eph. 4:29). We are to ensure that God's people are protected against the spread of bitterness, which is again connected to the way we use our tongues (Eph. 4:31-32). And we are to ensure that our assembly is free from the influence of certain kinds of people (v. 16a). In short, we need one another. Submitting to oversight and overseeing others are much more than simply coming to assembly meetings together.

Transition: So we need the right prescription to be healed from spiritual deformity and paralysis. We need God's grace, God's paths of peace with men and holiness before God, and God's oversight – the watchful care that our local church must provide for one another.

Appl: Before we leave this point, I would like to emphasize that this prescription is for our feet, not just our ears. No prescription will do a patient any good unless that patient gets the prescription filled and takes his medicine. Will we pray until we experience again the help of God's grace? Will we make peace with men who need our forgiveness, and will we seek to remove unholy practices from our lives? Will we appreciate the spiritual oversight provided to us and seek to faithfully provide it to other believers? If not,

we are not taking the medicine that has been prescribed, and our paralysis will persist.

If that happens long enough, we will succumb to what verse 13 warns us about – “lest that which is lame be turned out of the way.” When we are spiritually deformed and paralyzed, the Lord demands that we be healed, or we will be turned out of the way. We will be set aside. We may lose our opportunity to serve Him. We may lose our opportunity to be healed, and all because we refused to hear and to heed God’s prescription for that healing. We must hear the prescription in the command to be healed.

II. We must find the place for repentance in the command to be healed (vv. 16-17).

III: Rejection can be a very difficult experience. I experienced rejection the day I was laid off from my job with CCC. I had a house with a mortgage and a stay-at-home wife with three young children to provide for. But that rejection was only the rejection of man, and I knew that in spite of my fears God was in control and that I was securely accepted in the Beloved.

Appl: The rejection Esau experienced was far worse, because it was ultimately the rejection of God. God rejected Esau for two reasons. The first is fornication, upon which the author does not elaborate, and the second is desecration, which the author explains in some detail. *To desecrate something is to treat a holy thing as though it were not holy at all.* Esau did this with his birthright, selling it for the pleasure of eating a single meal. The sexual lust of fornication was probably related to how Esau felt about his birthright, because he ultimately chose wives who would be a hindrance and not a help to his calling in that regard.

What is the author trying to say to these NT Christians by bringing up the sins of Esau in this way? Well, it is clear from what else he says in this epistle that we NT Christians also have a birthright through the new birth (v. 23). To be the church of the firstborn [ones (pl.)] is to have the birthright. Our birthright is our church.

NT Christians can be desecrators of their birthright by treating their church as an unholy thing. That is a terrible sin, but it is not why Esau ultimately forfeited God's blessing on his life. No; the forfeiture of that blessing was due to his finding no place for repentance (v. 17). Esau wanted the blessing without repentance over his fornication and desecration of what God called holy. He even cried over the loss of this blessing, but he would not truly repent. And so, the command to be healed spiritually always involves finding the place of repentance. Repentance is very simple - "Lord, I sinned; I was wrong; thank you for the blood of Christ that cleanses me from all my sin." We cannot be healed from spiritual deformity and faithlessness without this. We must not expect God's blessing without this. Does repentance have a proper place in your life?

Conclusion: How tragic would be the paralytic who simply refused to listen to the command of the Lord to rise up and walk. We never read about any such case in the Gospels, do we? Jesus told the woman of Luke 13 to straighten up, and she did so. He told Lazarus to come out of the tomb, and he did so. He told the lame man to take up his bed and walk, and he did exactly that.

We have heard the command of the Lord to be healed from spiritual deformity and paralysis this morning. Will we heed it and be healed? God's grace is there for us; will we pray? God's paths are there for us; will we make peace with

others and pursue holiness? God's oversight is there for us; will we join the church and faithfully do our part? Perhaps most important of all this morning, will we do a better job than Esau did at finding the place in our lives for repentance this morning? God's healing and God's blessing await those who answer, "Yes, I will."

"A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction – the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*