

The passage from James is about the power of prayer in general. We will today focus only on prayer for healing.

1. Should we still do this? In 2022? Does God still heal? Yes!
 - Jesus healed many people, see e.g. the story in Mark which we read, and in Acts the disciple continue the practice. So how should we not do the same? It says nowhere in the Bible that one day prayers for healing should stop.
 - A recent book by professor Craig Keener contains descriptions of many cases of recent faith healings all over the world. Keener is a good scholar and by no means naïve. I lent my copy of the book to someone and I did not get it back; where is my book? [On Sunday no-one returned it...] We see that divine healings still happen today! This tells us that the Gospel is about the whole human person. God is not only interested in our souls but also in our physical wellbeing.
 - The elders are not the most important people, but they represent the church.
2. Yes, God does still heal people, so we should obey James: pray for the sick and anoint them with oil. I believe that the recent healing of Matthew (who since moved on to another church) was not only the work of the doctors, but also a result of prayer. This tells us that we should also consult doctors. It is not *either* prayer *or* NHS, but both.
3. Most healings in our time take place in the developing world. That is where they are most needed, because healthcare there is less in quality than in the West. By the way, there is no guarantee that a healed person will remain or become a believer. A faith healing does not guarantee faith afterwards.
4. What is the cause of illness? It can be sin, but that is not normally the case. Think of John 9, where Jesus says that neither the blind man nor his parents had sinned. Yet if we want to pray for healing and anoint someone, it is good to rule out the presence of sin in the person's life. In Mark 2 Jesus first forgives the sin of the lame man before he can heal him.
5. The big problem with praying for healing is that it does not always result in healing. Not everyone is healed. We all know cases of people who were not healed and we have all lost loved ones to cancer and other diseases. In a way this creates a painful distinction between those who are healed and those who are not. We could almost be tempted not to pray, but that would be the wrong response. [After the service Derek added that sometimes people who are not healed can have a valuable role in God's service.]
6. What to do if someone is not healed? We can only accept God's sovereignty. Paul had to do this question when the thorn in his flesh was not healed. God does not owe us an explanation. We have to leave things with Him. Some people are healed as a result of prayer, others are not.
7. Whatever might hinder someone's healing, it is surely not a weak faith! God's power is never dependent on the power of our faith. It would be very dangerous to criticise a sick person for their lack of faith! It could result in massive feelings of guilt. Again: we must leave these things with God, who is not answerable to us.
8. We conclude that healing through prayer and anointing is a complicated area, but that we should not therefore avoid it. Let us pray for those who suffer and if they ask for it, anoint them.