

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

Scripture: Various

"Why Aren't All the Saints Healed?" (part 2)

AN ALL TOO OFTEN ASKED QUESTION

We continue our series on answering the question, "Why doesn't God heal all the sick saints?" In other words, why aren't all Christians healed physically when they are prayed for?

In the last sermon, I mentioned the examples my brother, Adam, Jim Wheaton, Hunter Kelly, and even Fr. Commins. We found in the Bible that it is not always God's will – Looking at the Apostle Paul, Trophimus, Timothy and Elijah. We then looked at three key passages – **Is. 53; Mark 2, and James 5.** We saw that the foundation for any healing involves being in right relationship with Jesus Christ. That is what is most important.

And so the key to understanding the original question is to ask another question and that is, "What is the purpose of my illness?" You see if we believe in a Creator, we can see the order and design in the creation. Everything has a purpose. There is a reason for everything even if we don't always understand why. Do you remember your science class or watching a nature documentary? Science is always finding reasons why things are the way they are in nature. Everything is interconnected and every creature within an ecosystem has an important role to play. In fact, the Bible uses the human body as an example.

The same goes for illness. And so we can look at our illness one of two ways. You can say what a mistake? What a fluke? This is ridiculous and I don't want to have anything to do with it or with God. And some people head down that road. But let me say that it is a road of no return. It is the way of self-pity and bitterness. Or you can say, "You know what? This is happening for a reason." God knew this would happen to me. It hasn't taken Him by surprise. He loves me and He says He won't forsake me. I believe His Word, so now I am going to trust Him and see what happens.

And when we choose the latter, then we will be on the road to not only accomplishing God's will but we will see a transformation in our own life and those around us. Do you remember what I said about God's will when it comes to illness? That we be transformed from the inside out, that God uses us to transform others around us and that Jesus Christ be glorified. In fact, that is God's goal for us whether we are sick or well. **Romans 8:28-29** says "*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.*"

The truth is, when we are sick, often times God can do the more in our lives spiritually and in other people's lives than when we are well? How can this be?

Well, we will find four things that can happen as a result of sickness when you put your faith in God, in the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to look at two this morning.

POWER OF GOD

Please turn with me again to **2 Cor. 12:7-10**: ⁷*Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me--to keep me from exalting myself!* ⁸*Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.* ⁹*And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness " Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.* ¹⁰*Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."*

Notice that the Apostle Paul highlights his illness! This "messenger of Satan" continues to bother him. Yet, Paul declares that He experiences God's power more fully despite the sickness.

This is one of the results of those who put their trust in Christ when they are sick - that *the power of Christ may dwell in us*. Paul made an amazing discovery. He discovered that the weaker he became physically, the stronger he became spiritually

That's the power of God. You see, God wanted Paul to trust in His strength, not Paul's own. Paul had a tendency toward pride, not that he was proud, but God had given Paul such an abundant revelation of Himself that Paul could have been proud and so God gave him this "thorn in the flesh."

You see sometimes we may be sick so that God's power can be released through us. Do you remember in **John 9**, what Jesus said to the man born blind when the disciples asked who sinned, this man or his parents that he be born blind? Jesus replied, "*Neither his parents or he sinned, but that the work of God be demonstrated.*"

God will use our sickness to display his power. Jennifer Buczynski saw it in India with miraculous healings of the sick, blind and deaf. Fr. Commins saw it in Israel with the healing of his right leg. We have seen it before this altar with healings of our members.

But you see there is an important lesson that applies to all of us whether we are sick or well.

The truth is, our place of strength, what we thing makes us strong may be our greatest place of weakness. Many of times we say oh well, I've got a good mind. God can use that. But that may be where the devil gets you. You say I've got a strong body. That may become the devil's tool out. Let me tell you something friend. Your strength may be your greatest weakness.

If you were to travel to Edinburg Castle in Scotland, you would find a great fortress like building. It is built high on a rocky hill. It looks impenetrable. When the English controlled it in the 14th century, the Scots sent a raiding party of some 30 men. The English thought the castle was secure. They put sentries all around the important places in that castle except one place. On one particular side there's such a sheer rock cliff that it was thought impossible that the fortress could ever be attacked from that side. So no sentry was placed on that side. Do you know where the Scots attacked from? From that cliff. One in their party had grown up in that area and knew the best way to climb up through the rock. As a result, the Scots surprised the English and captured the fortress. You see, the place of strength became the place of

weakness. It was at the strongest point that the castle fell because their guard was let down.

And so sometimes our place of strength really is our place of weakness. And then let me say conversely that our place of weakness may be our greatest place of strength. We say "Well, I can't do this and I can't do that." Well, wonderful, then you can let the Lord do it, can't you? When you say I can't, then say "He can and I'm going to let him." That's exactly what the God was doing with the apostle Paul.

And you know even though many times we say well, I am so weak. but it may be we are still not weak enough and that's our problem. We're still not weak enough. Let give you an example. Chinese believer Watchman Kneel told a story of a Chinese man who was drowning. He was out in a particular river and many of the other Chinese there did not know how to swim and the man was crying for help. There was one man who stood on the shore who did know how to swim, but he would not go in. He wouldn't go and rescue the drowning man. Finally, it seemed as though the man who was drowning went under for the last time and the man on the shore finally jumped from the river bank and with powerful strokes went out to meet him. He put his arms around him and brought him to safety. When they got back to shore, the people around him didn't cheer, as a matter of fact, they scolded him. One man said, "I don't believe I've ever seen a man so much in love with his own life that you waited so long to save this man's life." But the swimmer said, "You don't understand. I'm not that good of a swimmer. If I had gone out there while this man was still fighting, he would have drowned us both. He said I had to wait until he was weak enough for me to save him."

I wonder if our problem sometimes isn't that when we think we're going under for the last time and we are so weak is that we're still not yet weak enough, we still have not bowed our heads and said, "Oh Lord, I can't but you can."

I think of the life of Buffalo Bills Quarterback Jim Kelly. It wasn't until after his son suffered and died that Jim finally came to the Lord. He was a proud man. He was angry at God for a long time, but his heart softened and he put his faith in the Lord some three years ago. And now he freely admits that God used his son's illness and death to bring him to faith. Can you imagine? When we are weak, thou O Lord art strong.

The fact is that God's power often is displayed through sickness. It did in the life of Paul, and it has in the lives of countless others and that is what gives a new dimension and dignity to sickness.

PRODUCTIVITY OF THE SPIRIT

Now there is something else that is true about the way God can use our illnesses - it's called the productivity of the Spirit. Let me put it in more familiar terms - *the fruit of the Spirit*. And such fruit involves the inner man and the outer man. Let me first talk about the outer man.

Jesus said these words in **Jn. 15:2**: "***Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.***" In other words, that it may be productive. Jesus is referring to when the gardener takes his pruning knife and goes to the vineyard and starts cutting away. And the little old vine if it could talk would say, "Ouch, that hurts, don't do that. Why are you making me suffer like this?" And the gardener, if he could talk to the vine would say, "It's not my purpose to make you hurt, but to make you productive."

And what is the fruit? - the impact we have on others for Christ. And often that only comes through suffering why?

Sometimes God can do more with us sick than He can when we are well.

It will put us in a place where we can be more productive spiritually to impact others and it gives us capacity to empathize and thereby help others who are going through the same thing.

Please turn with me now to **2 Cor. 1:3-6**: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation..."*

Notice Paul says his suffering is for your salvation and for your consolation.

The truth is when we have suffered loss and sickness and have walked with God through it, we can not only use it as a time to impact others for Christ, we will be able to minister to those who are going through something similar in a way far more powerful than if we had never experienced it.

I again think of Jim Kelly's words concerning his son. He had the dream of his son becoming a future hall of fame quarterback like he had been. But that was not meant to be. Instead, his son died at the age of eight of the rare Krabbe Disease. Kelly now recognizes that God has done more through his son's short life and illness than his son could have ever accomplished on the football field. Many lives are now saved as the result of new laws requiring the testing of newborns for rare diseases. Many more lives have been touched spiritually through the personal testimonies of Jim and Jill Kelly.

You see, sickness and suffering will not only mean power, but because of that power it will result in productivity and that my friends gives sickness and dignity and purpose unlike anything else on earth.

Now we can fight the reality and be discouraged and despondent and bitter or we can use it to allow God to work his power in us to transform our lives and the lives of others. The choice is ours. Next week Pastor Mike Chorey will be with us and then the following week we will wrap up our series with looking at two more purposes of sickness as we seek to answer the question, "Why doesn't God heal all the sick saints?"