

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 3)

AN ALL TOO OFTEN ASKED QUESTION

We continue our series on answering the question, "Why aren't all the saints healed?" In other words, when we pray for loved ones who we know are believers why doesn't God heal them right away?

Last week, we heard Pastor Mike Chorey share his testimony on how God has worked through his son Matthew's rare illness. Even though Matthew has been confined to wheelchair since being an infant, the Chorey's haven't given up faith and in fact, are still trusting God for a miracle.

While it may not always be God's will to heal us in the short term, it is in the long term. Jesus Christ came for that purpose. In the meantime, the key to understanding why healings don't take place right away is found in the posing of another question: **What is the purpose?** And as I mentioned last sermon, we can view our illness as a fluke or accident or understand that there is a purpose to it. In fact, when we go to God He will accomplish His plan for your life. Do you believe that? It is an integral part of the life of faith. Recall faith is not wishful thinking it is simply believing in something that you know is true but you have experienced it fully yet. **Hebrews 11:1** *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things not seen."*

And so by faith we believe the promises of God even though we haven't experienced all of them yet. Salvation is a perfect example. And of course there is **Romans 8:28**: *"And we know that all things work together for good for those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose."*

Now what is the good that comes from sickness? We began to look at four outcomes, four results that can come from our sickness. In fact, good will always come if we turn to God in Christ. Let me quickly review the first two.

POWER OF GOD

First of all, God's power will come through suffering and sickness. Recall St. Paul's words from **2 Cor. 12:9-12**: *⁹And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." ¹⁰Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰Therefore 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.*

The truth is the power of the Holy Spirit is most often demonstrated through times of suffering and sickness. St. Paul recognized this (see above). A couple weeks ago I was at a meeting with local pastors and one of the pastors mentioned if I had heard about the incredible miracle that had recently taken place. It turns out that a woman, who had been paralyzed for years from a car accident, was healed at a service at Full Gospel Tabernacle in Orchard Park just two months ago. God displays his power through miraculous healings. But it isn't just sudden healings - we talked about the strength, perseverance and help we receive

during the course of illness.

PRODUCTIVITY OF THE SPIRIT

Then we talked about the **productivity of the Spirit**. Let me put it in more familiar terms - the fruit of the Spirit. In other words, God can sometimes make us more productive for His kingdom when we are sick than 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. Recall **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;"***

When we have gone through hardship and suffering we will be in a better position afterwards to help those who are going through something similar. Why do bad things happen to believers? It's God's way of showing the world that there is a difference. How can we minister to those who are in need unless we have gone through it ourselves?

PURITY OF HEART

Now, the third reason that the Lord doesn't always heal right away involves purity of heart. There is nothing like being sick or confronting our own mortality that brings into focus what is really important in life. What is really important is our relationship with God and those around us. And when our heart is pure it means that it is totally focused on the things of God and reflects the love of Christ.

Now sickness is one of God's warning sign that there is something wrong in creation. It is not God's original design or plan that we be sick. It is part of the curse of sin. Even though often a sickness is not a direct result of any wrong we have done, it still is a result of our sin condition. And we know we are all guilty.

So sickness is an opportunity to get right with the Lord. Listen for a moment to **Hebrews 12:7-11**: ***"It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."***

No one likes to get disciplined. But God disciplines those whom He loves and He often will use our sickness as a form of discipline - to take us to the place of total surrender and obedience to Him. In fact, **Hebrews 12:7-11** tells us that God disciplines us ***"...that we may share his holiness."*** Why are we sick? It is for discipline. Why are we disciplined? So that we might be purified. The truth is sickness has

a way many times of purifying. I'm not saying that everybody who is sick needs to be purified, but I am saying that it can be one of the blessings of being sick. Purity of heart can come through suffering and through sickness.

Let's look at another example, **Rom. 5:4**: *"And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."* In God's Kingdom, character is king. But you won't get good character unless you go through the fire.

But also notice what keeps us going – the hope of God - looking forward to the end of the suffering. Because in Christ there is always an end to the suffering, and at the end of that suffering there is resurrection and joy.

My last words to my brother as I left hospice at 5 PM on a Thursday night were, "This too shall pass." It was my way of letting him know that he wouldn't have to deal with the cancer forever. Remarkably, after God gave me this word, God called him home only four hours later.

As I reflect on what happened to my brother while he was battling cancer, one of his last emails to my wife Kathleen and I, also comes to mind. He wrote: *"Thank you, as always, for your love and prayers. I'm doing okay under the circumstances. God is making Himself known to me in a real way over the last couple weeks, and in the end that's all that really matters. I'm combating fear and apprehension about the future and I'm blessed to have my loved ones around me praying and supporting me during this time. I sometimes can't believe this is actually happening, I'm not resigned to giving up at this point, but I know that God is carrying me through each hour. It's what we've based our entire life on –why should we bail out now? I know that He's revealing Himself to me, there's no explanation for any of it. I couldn't do this without Him. Could you imagine what a basket case I would be? It saddens me to think that there are people in the very same boat as me here in WNY that are frightened and scared and have no peace. I don't know what the future holds but I know who holds the future. It's a cliché, but it's true. I know I'm not guaranteed tomorrow but I'm going to try to make the most of each passing moment at this point. And I'm still holding out for a miracle. God bless you with a double portion of joy today, thanks for always being there for me, I love you and the kids very much!!! Adam."*

My brother became more and more focused on the things of God as he approached heaven. And rather than getting angry at God, he said to me on a number of occasions, "The Lord is merciful." Can you imagine? Facing death, experiencing emotional anguish and still being able to say the Lord is merciful?

You see my brother recognized an important truth. We have nothing without God. Though we may not understand right now, though we may go through pain and suffering right now, the Lord is still with us, and He will never forsake us because we are members of his family. That's where Adam found his strength. That's why he was able to press on because of the One in whom he trusted.

Let me also say that sickness is also a test for those who are healthy. It tests us to see if we are really walking the walk. It challenges our motives. God says we are to be there for the sick. We are to

visit the sick, pray for the sick and encourage the sick. How many times have I heard those who are sick say, "I found out who my true friends really were." Listen when someone gets sick, it's not only a test of their faith, it's also a test of those who are healthy.

I thank God that He has a loving purpose for sickness, not only of power and of productivity but of purity as well.

PRAISE OF JESUS CHRIST

May I say, finally, there is the praise that comes through suffering. God gets the glory many times through our suffering and through our sickness. The Bible makes this clear, that we learn to praise and glorify God when we're sick. In **John 11:4**, Jesus said concerning the sickness of Lazarus. ***"This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it."*** Now, that's clear isn't it? It's for the glory of God, and specifically Jesus Christ.

In fact, as a result of Lazarus's sickness subsequent death and resuscitation many believed in the Lord Jesus Christ – ***"Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him."*** (Jn. 11:45).

Even our death ought to glorify the Lord. **Ps. 116:15** says that ***"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."*** The Bible describes the Apostle Peter's death this way in **John 21:19**: **Jesus said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go."*** Now this He said, signifying by **what kind of death he would glorify God.** And when He had spoken this, He said to him, ***"Follow Me!"***

Tradition says that when St. Peter was taken to be crucified, he asked to be crucified upside down in deference to the Lord. He glorified God when He died. The truth is we can glorify God when we are healthy, when we are sick and when we die. Isn't it wonderful that in all things God can have the preeminence and that whatever we do we should do all for the glory of God?

All of us are susceptible to sickness. Some here have chronic illnesses. Remember God's got your back. Your sickness didn't take him by surprise. He will see you through it. And whether we are sick or well, we are always to work towards healing and we are to pray for healing. For even if we aren't healed physically right away, much good can come from our illness - we can see and experience God's power, we can be spiritually productive, we can have purity of heart, and all to bring glory to God in Jesus Christ!

That, my friends, is the purpose of sickness, and it is why God doesn't heal all the sick saints. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!