

IS ANY SICK AMONG YOU?

O how we want to flee the possibility of that question being one that the journey of our life may bring us headlong into. “Is any sick among you?” We see James 5:14 bringing up this question for us to ponder. We cry out against the physical, emotional, and spiritual infirmities we face in our fallen humanity and long for the state of perfection as when God first created man. However, as a result of our sin we face these times of “weakness, feeble, without strength, powerless,” as Strong’s defines it. At times we are simply observers of others’ sicknesses. Other times we are caring for those that are sick. Then there are the times that we are the ones that are sick. As we face the difficulties of failing health, we begin to understand more clearly the words of Paul in Philippians 1:21, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Sicknesses vary in intensity and duration. At times a sickness may be short lived and not have much effect on our quality of life. Having a cold for a week or the flu for several days can be disheartening, but our body usually soon heals, and we move our attention back to the things of life. Our focus shifts from ourselves and our needs to fulfilling the needs of those in our responsibility. On the other hand, we can have chronic or terminal illnesses. These drag on for months and possibly into years with little or no explanation for their cause, and often times a gradual degeneration of health is all we come to expect. We still long for healing and perfect health and can pursue that through medical evaluation of our symptoms. Doctors, tests, results, repeat, repeat. The illness goes on and on.

Often in this medical journey we begin to question and doubt the perfect will of God. We are tempted to take our focus off God’s sovereignty and begin the path of self-pity. We turn from praising God for answering our most important need of salvation to, “Why this? Why me?” We begin to argue with God. “It’s not fair!” We want to bargain with Him. “if I could just have my health back, I’d gladly live in Africa or some remote mission field. Just let me be able to do a normal day’s work, and I’ll put fifteen percent in the offering instead of ten. Just don’t give this cross for me to accept and bear.” We have been weak physically, and the focus on ourselves and our pain begins to take its toll on us emotionally and spiritually.

As we battle with sickness, at some point we reach a crossroads. Sometimes this happens very soon after the sickness begins. possibly one doctor visit reveals a terminal illness with little hope of recovery and more likely death within months. The conflict of laying down our will to that of our heavenly Father rages within our breast. Other times the process is a longer, more gradual conflict that slowly reaches a crescendo within us. Now we have this emotional turmoil added to the already heavy affliction of physical infirmity. What can we do? is there an answer? There are several scriptures we could turn to, but we would like to turn in our Bibles to the book of James. We see the apostle here encouraging us on in the midst of life’s temptations. “Count it all joy,” he says, “when ye fall into divers temptations.” Can this be how we as Christians are to respond to all the difficulties in life? “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire,

wanting nothing.” So as we face this crossroads in our afflictions, we see as Christians we are called to a different world view than what the first impulses of our flesh would dictate to us.

How do we come to that point of surrender? To the place we can echo those words from James with all of our hearts?

As we as born-again believers have accepted the atoning work of Christ on Calvary for our sins, we have received the call to surrender our all at His feet. This is to follow His teaching, His cross, His directions to how every aspect of our life will be lived each and every day. In this following Him as the Way, Christ has taught that we are to be baptized into His body. This water baptism we receive is similar in type to the anointing in the Old Covenant, when the prophet, priest, or king was anointed to fill the special office that God desired from his life. Our baptism is an outward ceremony indicating the inner spiritual cleansing that Christ has done for us, but it also is an anointing and a setting us apart to the claim of Christ on our lives for His work. We are no longer our own, we cannot live to fulfill our own dreams and desires. It is rather His desires we now live for, whether through health or affliction. We must continually grow in our awareness of this calling and being set apart for the purposes of God throughout our earthly journey.

As we grow in this understanding, we will still face the temptations to deny our faith and to doubt the goodness of God in the midst of physical, emotional, and spiritual infirmities. To find victory in this intense battle we must heed the instruction James gives us in chapter 5 verse 14. “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.” Here we have another anointing ceremony, a recommitting of our lives into the hands of God for His will and purposes to be accomplished through the shadow He is calling us through. We have again opened our heart to His will by confessing our sin and failures and placing all our desires under His plan. This is coming to a complete surrender to Christ, hands outstretched, a heart soft and pliable in the hands of the Master potter.

Let us now meditate upon what James reveals is accomplished through this simple ceremony. James 5:15-16, “And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” The sick is saved! No, he does not say he is always physically healed. We will still desire healing for our problem, but we have come to a greater place of rest in desiring Christ’s plan for our lives to be fulfilled. We understand our greatest need has been met. James goes on to explain that if we have committed sins they are forgiven. The resentment toward God, and the self-pity for allowing this illness that Satan wanted to use to destroy us spiritually, has been confessed. We have again surrendered our broken lives into the hands of our Father. Communion with God has been restored. By surrender to God at this crossroads, we have taken one more step towards eternal life. Will God heal physically? We do not know, but we do know he heals spiritually and emotionally, and we now accept that He knows best, and we will take up our cross and follow Him through this life to where He awaits our homecoming in Glory.

~Matthew Ebersole