

When the Healing Doesn't Come

The Holy Spirit Today

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We come today to a message that I've been anticipating for a while, a message that I trust will have an impact on your lives and one that will spread beyond the walls of this church to be an encouragement to many in their suffering and in their sorrows. We have spent several weeks on a series that we've titled "The Holy Spirit Today" and we've looked at a number of controversial theological issues and we have a few more to go before we finish this series before the end of the year.

Last week, we looked at the topic of divine healing and made the conclusive case, in my opinion, that God does not gift any individuals with the power to bring divine healing at their touch to anyone. Yes, we might seek healing from God in prayer. Yes, God answers our prayers for healing at times, but there's not a man in the world that is gifted in the way that the apostles were gifted to lay hands and bring immediate physical healing to people who have deformed limbs and things of that nature. Everything that you see going on in charismatic circles is a cheap counterfeit of what the biblical gift was and, therefore, we dismiss it out of hand as not being the real thing; that it is not attesting to anything that is a work of God in giving affirmation to the things that those people might teach. God gives affirmation to teaching now by it being in conformity with his completed canon in the 66 books of the Bible and it is by that that we measure what is true, not by false signs and wonders that people claim to be doing today. There are copies of that message out that you can pick up on your way out. We would invite you to that.

That leaves a question that needs to be answered and perhaps at times these matters are discussed without a proper attention to the pastoral aspect of the issue and that's what I want to try to address here today. I say this with a smile in my heart, if not on my face. It is common for those of you that attend our church on a regular basis, you know that it is common for me to go on a tangent in my preaching and I'll go on a tangent for 5 or 10 or 15 minutes as I think of something that I want to emphasize in the midst of a message. Today is just a variation of that sort of thing. Today in the midst of this series on the Holy Spirit, I'm going to go on a 60 minute tangent on the series because there's something that I just feel like is very important to address.

Why is it that there is such a market for divine healing and people going off to charlatans trying to find help? God will have a special measure of judgment for those who are practicing those things and practicing that deception and offering people false hope on

things that they cannot deliver, and their judgment will be just, but setting aside the false teachers who purvey that, why is there a market for it? Why do people flock to that? People look for healing because they're sick, they're miserable, they're desperate either for themselves or for a loved one that they might bring to a situation like that, and they're looking for help, they're looking for hope, but they're looking in the wrong place and we want to help people like that in what we have to say today, and even within the walls of our own building here today, we ask the question where do we go, what are we to think when the healing doesn't come when inevitably dementia takes over the mind for some and does not release them from its grip? What do we say to parents with a deathly sick child that they love dearly, that they pray earnestly for and only to see their life continue to waste away? What are we to think as old age comes and begins to take its toll on our body and our prior vigor and we see the decline that we realize is not going to be reversed? We take a fall, we injure ourselves and we start to feel the weight of a body that is not doing what it did in our younger days?

You know, I'm going on a tangent on a tangent here with what I'm about to say, but part of the reason that the purveyors of prosperity can get away with it, is that they preach as young men to young people and by the time life catches up with them, everybody has forgotten about what they said 10 or 20 years ago with their promises of health and well-being and prosperity and all of that, and you just kind of move on and you forget that and people forget the spiritual travesty that took place in their younger days, in the days of their youth when they weren't prepared for the inevitability of the difficulties of life that would come, and you can get away with that because you preach and you do a hit-and-run and you move on to something else and you move on to another church in two or three years and everybody forgets what you've said, and it's an abominable, deplorable practice that men make a good living by being purveyors of false hope. We're not here to do that. We're not about that. We're here for the long haul. We're here to do what the Lord would have us to do hopefully, and we realize in the midst of that as we go through life together as a church, corporately as we go through these things together, we realize that we need, you and I, we need something on which to build our lives. We need something on which to build our lives that will carry us through the inevitable hardship that will come, something that will stand against the waves of adversity; something that will stand when the earthquakes of hardship rumble underneath the feet of our lives and shake us from our prior seeming stability, and that's what we want to do today, that's what we try to do over the course of time here but in this particular message, we want to address the topic that inevitably everybody has to deal with. There is a universal application to this sooner or later dealing with the topic of what do we do when the healing doesn't come; what do we do when the body does give way and it's obvious that it's not going to get better. What do we do then and it's not just for the permanently irreversible things, it's also, you know, these are the same things that can encourage us even in the things and the adversities that come and go, and it's not simply medical health related things of which we speak although that's going to be the focus from which I speak here today, but these principles are going to apply to all manner of life adversity. This is the foundation of living a Christian life with hope and that's what we want to try to give to you here this morning, Lord willing, and by his grace and by his Spirit.

One of the things that is just so very important for us to realize that the health and wealth and prosperity preachers never quite get around to talking about because if they did, it would undermine their own so-called ministry. Scripture says in Proverbs 18:14 that, "The spirit of a man can endure his sickness, But as for a broken spirit who can bear it?" If you have hope in the midst of your illness, you can go through it. You can find your way through your adversity if there is a hope and something of, not to be too lyrical here, if there is a song in your heart and I'm using that metaphorically. If there is hope in your heart, you can find your way through sickness because man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, and we anchor ourselves in his word and in his hope and that can get us through bodily decay. But if you don't have hope, then what difference does it make? If you have hope, you can deal with sickness. If you had no hope, no real hope, then beloved, physical healing doesn't really matter. People with perfectly fine physical bodies commit suicide all the time, don't they, because hope has been extinguished in their heart, and the fact that they might have physical ability doesn't do anything to give them a reason to live.

So with that little bit of introduction to just see the issues and to see the broad application, I want to give you a perspective on how to think about life when the healing doesn't come; how to think about life when the prayers are not answered; how to think about life when it is lonely and difficult and discouraging and it seems like there is no light to be found in the darkness. What do we do? How do we think? You know, in some ways this is the most fundamental issue that we could deal with in the Christian life because what we're really talking about is what is our philosophy of life? What is it that drives us? What do we think about? Why do we exist? Why do we live? What gives us hope? What gives us encouragement? Those are the things that we need to have clear and to be able to articulate in a way for ourselves and also for you to be able to minister to others in their hardship. And we realize that for those that have been under the dark ministry of health and wealth preachers for so long, that there is a whole renewal of mind that needs to take place for them, a whole different perspective on life, and we'll address that as we go along. So there's a bit of a logical sequence here that I hope will be evident to you as we go along.

First of all, what do we want to see? Where is there hope when the healing doesn't come? Write this down if you're taking notes, point 1: there is hope in God's plan. There is hope in God's plan and one of the many things that I despise about prosperity preachers is that they limit the idea of God's blessing simply to that of physical and external blessing and if you have that, then that's all that they have to offer you, but what if your spine is broken in an automobile accident and you're confined to a wheelchair and there's no healing to come for that? Well then, what do you have to say to me then? And the embarrassed silence that comes after that kind of speaks to the emptiness of that whole philosophy of so-called ministry. For us, we have an answer for all of those things. For the biblically informed Christian, there is a philosophy of life that informs everything and that gives us strength in the heights of prosperity or the depths of sorrow and all points in between. There is an unchanging anchor upon which we respond to every circumstance in life. There is a prior understanding that informs the way that we think and the way that we respond, and that continually fuels our hearts with hope and confidence and a sense

that there is something greater at work even if this is difficult for me in the present, and we all need to tap into that, so to speak.

There is hope in God's plan and what we mean by that statement is this: the God of the Bible is involved in everything that happens. The God of the Bible has ordained everything that comes to pass. There are not aspects of your life, there are not aspects of human history that somehow fall out of the plan, outside the plan of God's intention that are just random and are assaulting us. It's not like that. There's not a random molecule in the universe. There is not a random detail in your life. There is not an unforeseen occurrence that has come to you that hasn't previously been planned by God, accounted by God, and for which he has a plan to work out things according to his will and for your good, especially for those of us that are in Christ. The God of the Bible is involved in everything that happens. He works out everything according to his purpose.

Ephesians 1:11 says that God "works all things after the counsel of His will." That's Ephesians 1:11. You can look it up later. God works all things after the counsel of his will. Everything that happens, God is at work in. Everything that happens is an expression of his will that he established before the foundation of the world. All of a sudden everything in your life, your prior broken relationships, the present broken relationships, the difficulties of physical loss, everything suddenly is connected to a greater purpose that is at work even if you don't see it and even if you do not understand it.

God works all things after the counsel of his will. Beloved, that means something. It means a lot of things but we're just going to try to stick to the basics here today. Your suffering is no accident. Your suffering is not a bad piece of luck. It could never be that way in light of what Scripture teaches about the God of the Bible; of his sovereign purpose in everything that happens. Think about the difficulties in your physical trials since that's kind of what prompted this, and think with me, let's think through it just a little bit, shall we, on the most basic, simple, familiar principles that are found in Scripture. Jesus said in Matthew 10:30 that the very hairs of your head are numbered. God knows the number of hairs on your head. Now beloved, if he knows something that is seemingly by our standards so inconsequential as that, don't you think that he is equally aware with great concern and interest of the things that affect your day-to-day life? If he knows the hairs on your head, he knows everything else that's happening in your body as well. It's not that he's just, you know, a cosmic hairdresser and that happens to be his item of interest. It's a statement of his care and his concern and his sovereignty over every aspect of your existence.

Now stop and think about that for a bit. That's all well and good to talk that way when you're in good health, but do you see that there is a great sense of hope and a great sense of comfort in the recognition that if physical difficulty has come to you, that God has his hand on that; that God has a plan for that because he works all things after the counsel of his will. He works all things after the counsel of his will, included in that is the suffering that he brings to your life. It's not that we need God to repel the attacks of Satan in these things as if Satan was inflicting things upon us that are contrary to the will of God. When

Satan afflicted Job, he had to get permission from God first to do it, didn't he? So as John MacArthur has said in the past, even the devil is God's devil. Even whatever the devil is doing, God is using and working and overcoming to direct to his purposes. Joseph said in Genesis 50:12 to his brothers who had sold him into slavery after all of that had passed and circumstances were different, he said, "You meant evil for me but God meant it for good." So that your affliction has a purpose in the plan of God and under the wise and sovereign and good and loving nature of God, if there is a purpose in your affliction then somehow it is a good and loving purpose that he has to carry out.

Now we may not understand that, we may not grasp that, we may not even appreciate it in the moment but that doesn't change the fundamental reality that God is at work and that is what gives you hope. If God has done the lesser thing by numbering the hairs on your head, beloved, he has done the greater thing in overseeing this illness and affliction that has come to you or to your loved ones, and suddenly we're not astronauts cast out in space just wandering out in zero gravity and floating away into a meaningless existence. No, we're anchored in a purpose of our loving God who in one or another, for one reason or another, has planned these hard times for you or your loved one. So that changes everything. That changes everything and hear me well, my Christian brother, my Christian sister, a divine plan is at work in your life. What you are suffering is not an unexpected development that surprised God, rather it is an outworking of what he intended from the very beginning and that changes everything.

Now one of the things that you need to remember and one of the things that you need to connect in your mind is that this is not an abstraction of God's sovereign working out of his plan, it's not an abstract plan that he has working out in your life, the God who planned your suffering is the same God who suffered himself on the cross of Calvary to pay for your sins; is the God who loved you enough to send Christ into the world, to send Christ, to send his beloved Son so that whoever believes in him might not perish but have everlasting life. The love of the cross is that perfect work in the plan of God that is being manifested in your suffering and so you have to bring all of these things together. You must think theologically. You must think biblically. You must think rightly about God and bring it down into the details of your life. God is sovereign and he works all things after the counsel of his will. God is a God of love as shown conclusively at the cross of Jesus Christ and if the love of God shown at the cross is the love that is at work in the plan that has brought suffering into your life, then there's hope. Then there's reason for confidence, there's reason to trust.

And there's one other thing that we can say about these things, about this plan of God in your life, and we're talking at basic levels here: when you grasp this, beloved, what we're talking about right here, when you grasp this, different questions start to come to mind and different questions ennoble your struggle, ennoble your difficulty, ennoble your illness. Instead of asking questions like, "Where can I find healing for this? Is there a faith healer that could relieve me of my affliction?" And chasing around the country as some do going to different healing crusades, never finding relief, never finding that they pass the screening process to get on stage with their visible ailment that the man has no power to resolve, rather than saying where can I find healing, I've got to find healing, you

can start to ask fundamental questions like this, "God, whatever may have happened in the past, what do you have for me as I look to the future? What is your purpose in this for me? God, lead my life, lead my thinking so that the purpose that you have for me in this illness is achieved." And that is a different perspective on the way that we think about these things.

Now before I go any further and I realize that what I've just said might be misunderstood, before I go any further in the message let me say this: yes, yes, yes, yes, you should and can bring your sickness and sorrow to God in prayer and ask him for relief. That's legitimate. If we can pray for God to give us our daily bread, as Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6, surely we can bring the need that physical hardship brings and bring that to him legitimately and to ask him for help in that. I support every effort to get good medical treatment to bring relief if medical treatment can help you of whatever sort that you might seek. Indeed, we could go so far as to say that God usually in this age uses those kinds of medical means to bring physical healing to those who are suffering. God is not going to heal my decayed tooth if I have that immediately and directly, but he might use the hands of a qualified dentist to bring me relief, and when he does that, it's God bringing the healing through a means and we're not to despise that. We can seek that out. I'm not saying not to seek relief if relief can be had, we're talking about something just a little bit different here today. We're saying what do we do when the healing doesn't come, when there aren't answers for it, and then what do we do? Then what do we think? Well, we start by realizing that there's hope in God's plan and we start there.

Let's go to a second point. I kind of did this overarching thing and let's go to our second point here this morning to realize that there is hope in Christ's salvation. There is hope in Christ's salvation and I like to say this, these kinds of things, I've said them from time to time over the years, let's start here: one of the things, one of the aspects about not getting healing is that there is a message embedded in that that's not a new piece of divine revelation, it's just an application of common sense and working out the implications of what that tells you, your body is doomed for failure sooner or later. "It is appointed for man to die once and after this comes judgment," and your present sickness whether it's temporary or whether it's chronic and lasting, your present sickness is functioning like the warning bells at a railroad track warning you of a coming danger that you don't presently see. There is a ding, ding, ding going off that is supposed to grab your attention to warn you that there is a danger in the area that perhaps you are not sufficiently aware of, not sufficiently giving cognizance to, and what sickness tells you is that there is an early warning sign that sooner or later death is coming. Your bodily sickness, your bodily ailment is an indication that there is something worse, so to speak, physically coming down the line, that this life is not permanent, that your health is not unassailable, that sooner or later there will be a coming reckoning with the angel of death, so to speak.

Look in your Bible at Psalm 49. There are a couple of passages that I want to take you to as we think about this. As you're turning there, I understand that we're not wired to consider death even in a gathering like this in a Christian church. There are more than enough people that want to push that topic away from their thought. I don't want to think about that. We don't want to leave our loved ones behind. We don't know what death

holds for us. It's unpleasant. It's frightening. We don't want our loved ones to leave us. There are a lot of reasons to avoid it, in one sense, in a superficial human sense but, beloved, Scripture tells us, Scripture repeatedly brings it to our consideration saying that wise people bring this into account in the way that they view life.

Psalm 49:10 says, "he sees that even wise men die; The stupid and the senseless alike perish And leave their wealth to others. Their inner thought is that their houses are forever And their dwelling places to all generations; They have called their lands after their own names. But," verse 12, "But man in his pomp will not endure; He is like the beasts that perish." You're going to die just like a dog dies. Your life will come to an end just like any other beast does.

Now at what point, at what aspect in your thinking and what approach to your philosophy of life have you accounted for that in the way that you think about life? You cannot, beloved, you cannot give in to the temptation to just ignore death and hope everything works out in the end and one of the blessings of sickness and illness and difficulty is that it pierces through that false sense of confidence, it pierces through that refusal to think about reality and it presses upon you death is real and therefore we need to come to grips with it. What are we going to do with it?

In Ecclesiastes 7:2 it says, "It is better to go to a house of mourning Than to go to a house of feasting, Because that is the end of every man, And the living takes it to heart." You go to a funeral and it's undeniable. It's all laid out in front of you. That's why pastors so often refer to that verse.

Speaking of Ecclesiastes, go to chapter 3, if you will. Ecclesiastes 3 just after the book of Proverbs. Ecclesiastes 3, beginning in verse 19. Ecclesiastes 3:19 says, "the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust." Now he's speaking there from an earthly perspective and he's simply making the point that as a beast lives, his destination is ultimately death, so it is with humans. We live for a while, we have it good for a while, but ultimately we're all coming out to the same destination, we're all going out the same exit door from this life, we're all going out the exit door of death, if the Lord tarries.

So the question is what do we think about that? What do we do about that? Why is there death in the first place? Isn't that an important question to ask? Why do people die? The Bible says that death entered through sin. Sin is a consequence of humanity's rebellion against God. You will die for your own sin. And so we realize and we're brought face-to-face with the fact that death is a consequence of rebellion against God and if we are to deal rightly with death and to come to grips with it, we need something that can deliver us from the great weight of the problem that caused it in the first place. You will die because you're a sinner and your sickness is an early indication, an early warning light on the panel telling you that it's time to check the engine, to check the heart of the matter for you.

Stepping back, just speaking generally of men in general, the question becomes, "So what will happen to you when you inevitably die? What will become of you?" You see, when the healing doesn't come, that issue is pressed upon you and it leads you beyond your illness to this reality, forget your body, forget your body which is destined to die, what about your eternal soul? What is going to happen to your soul when you die? You see, if we just promise everybody healing and even if everybody got healed from all of their affliction, if we left that question unanswered, we would have failed miserably in addressing the greatest need of the human heart. We don't want to do that here today. There is hope in Christ's salvation. When the healing doesn't come and you reflect on your soul, you say, "I need a Savior. I need someone to deliver me," and that brings us into the sweetness of the Gospel that God sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world on a mission of mercy to save sinners from the judgment that their sin deserves; that you can be reconciled to God through faith in Christ and that that gives you a surpassing purpose and that salvation gives you that which outlives death, which transcends your human body.

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life; no one come to the Father except through Me." You know, it would be better for you, just think in terms of comparisons here, it's better to have a body that is riddled with terminal cancer and to have a soul that is saved by Christ than to have a perfectly healthy body and a soul that is dead within, separated from God and under his wrath, facing eternal judgment. Think through what matters. Think through. Go to the end of life and beyond and think through it all, think it through all the way to the end, and if your sickness teaches you to take your soul seriously and to seek Christ and to put your faith in him, then your sickness has brought you great hope out of the midst of the affliction. God offers free, full, complete, immediate forgiveness for those who trust in Christ and if your suffering leads you to faith in Christ, you have an eternal hope that illness and death cannot take away.

Now step back, take a breath on this, and recognizing that I'm speaking to many who are truly suffering as you hear these words, the pain is constant and severe and unremitting and I'd be a fool not to take that seriously, but what I ask you to do for the sake of your own hope, for the sake of Christ, is to realize that if you are in Christ, you have something that transcends even your illness. If you have Christ, you have everything and you have a better hope that lies ahead and this suffering is temporary. Even if it lasts for the rest of life, it's temporary and compared to eternity with Christ, this suffering is a wisp of a moment of smoke in the breeze that dissipates in the end and culminates in that which cannot be taken away. Better to have a hope that culminates in glory that cannot be taken away rather than to want something in this life that is passing and then find that the smoke of eternal torment has been yours because you never repented and put your faith in Christ. So we have to view these things from an eternal perspective. We have to view them from the perspective of salvation and, beloved, if you have Christ, there is your hope. If you have Christ, there is your sufficiency. If you have Christ, then these other things are secondary by comparison and it does not diminish the reality of suffering to say what I'm about to say: it is better to die in Christ than to have healing without him. It is better to die in Christ than to have healing without him.

So there's this eternal perspective that informs the way that we view these things but I realize that even as we say these things, there is still the difficulty of life to live, right? I mean, if the pain is unremitting and the healing doesn't come, "Pastor, excuse me, excuse me but I still have to live today. What about today?" Well, let's go to our third point and answer that question. The third point for this morning: there is hope in God's grace. There is hope in God's grace.

I had someone recently who had lost a daughter to illness some time ago, who said something very profound to me, a Christian woman who got it, and I'm not going to do justice to the way that she said it in how I'm about to describe it but this is a woman who buried her 6 or 7 year old daughter, okay? So she's known the ropes in these matters and she said that our tendency is to just make our plans and we just plan everything according to everybody being healthy the way that we want, and then when that doesn't happen, then we're devastated by it. She said the problem is the expectations that we bring to life and the fact that we want it a certain way and then when that doesn't happen, then we feel like we've lost something rather than viewing it from the perspective, taking it from day-to-day, holding it lightly, and when this happens you say, "Oh, this is an unfolding of God's plan for me." Now she loved her daughter. She has hope of seeing her again but she's making a very profound point that when the healing doesn't come, when we lose the loved one, that that's not the end. All that this says is that God has a different plan of grace, a different plan of mercy that he is working out in your life than what you anticipated at the beginning, and when you view life from that perspective, then all of a sudden there are all kinds of things for your heart to feed on rather than the regret of loss, rather than the regret of not having gotten what you had hoped to receive. And I say these things gently, I say these things having been on the receiving end of that kind of experience in my life and so I say it in sympathy as we talk about these things and all of that just to say that we're not making a superficial point when we say here in point 3, there is hope in God's grace, we're actually giving the biblical answer to how we deal with suffering in this life as I will show you in a moment.

So, yeah, we tend to look ahead and we want answers to every possible issue. Some of you are great planners and this is a particular struggle for you. Well, if this happens, what happens then and what do I do then, and you just work out all of the permutations. Well, what do you do when the healing doesn't come? What if your illness means the future is uncertain? What if change is not possible? Thinking of this woman who buried her daughter some years ago, she's not going to see her daughter again in this life. Well, where is hope then? Do we live in anxiety and unbroken fear as a result? No. No, that couldn't possibly be it, could it? Not if you learn to accept the grace that is given in the moment.

I want you to turn to Matthew 6 with me. This might not be the place that you would immediately go to in this but I want you to see the nature of things. In Matthew 6 in verse 9, Jesus is teaching his disciples how he wants them to pray and he teaches us in verse 9, he says, "Pray, then, in this way." This is the pattern for the way that you should approach prayer, think about your relationship to God, think about your sanctification,

think about your purpose in the brief 70 years that you have here on earth. "Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name." Your glory, O God. "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven." So there's this aspect of, "God, I submit to Your plan. I submit to what You have for me and I pray that Your will would be done." Then look at this in verse 11, "Give us this day our daily bread." Our daily bread. Give us what is necessary for today. And Jesus goes back to the idea of today versus tomorrow at the end of chapter 6, and I'm skipping over so many important things here but we taught on this in the past. Matthew 6:34 says, "do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Beloved, I'm not going to be a false teacher who promises you healing that may not come. There may not be healing for you either miraculously or through the means of medicine, but what I can tell you, beloved, where you can find hope is that there's grace for today, that there is sufficient grace for today, and this is where the focus is meant to go. Your suffering is designed in part to relieve you from your dependence on self, to purge you from your self-confidence in what's happening around you. It's designed to cause you to look dependently to your Christ, to look dependently to your God and to say that, "Your grace is enough for me. Am I in Christ?" you say, "Then I have all that I need. Oh, that hurts but I have Christ. Oh, this isn't getting better but I have Christ." And moment by moment drawing strength from the reality that the eternal Son of God has set his eternal affection on you, he knows you by name, he knows the hairs on your head and he loves you in the midst of it, and he has eternally loved your soul and given himself up for you in such a way that that becomes more important and precious to you than the present aspect of your suffering.

That's what the Apostle Paul learned in 2 Corinthians 12. Turn there with me, if you would. 2 Corinthians 12:7. And as I hope you're seeing, beloved, my purpose in saying these things is not to chastise you or to rebuke you at all, but rather to point that which can give strength and comfort to your heart in the midst of those times when the healing doesn't come. I just want to deal with things honestly. I want to deal with reality.

Paul says in chapter 12, verse 7, as he speaks of the thorn in his flesh, whatever that was, he says in verse 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!" Paul says, "My unrelenting trial had a purpose in humbling me, that I would not boast about myself, I would not boast of my apostolic gift or the visions that I had seen, and the pain kept me from going to the sin of pride." And that was God's purpose in it and he says in verse 8, "Concerning this," concerning this thorn I had, "I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me." "God, relieve me from this." Stated differently in the terms in which we're using today, Paul prayed three times, why? Because the healing wasn't coming for him either. And in verse 9, he says, "And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.'" He says, "My grace is enough. My grace is all that you need." And as I've said in the past, you don't know that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you've got, right? And it's only when you've been reduced to that kind of spiritual rubble that you can truly affirm this kind of transcendent statement that brings much greater

glory to God than any physical healing ever could because it is not natural, it is not human, so to speak, it's not a product of our sinful flesh in the midst of suffering to say that something I can't see gives me satisfaction, joy and comfort. I have a joy, satisfaction and comfort in Christ that transcends this situation where the healing is not coming for me. And suddenly in a life like that, in a heart like that, the great glory of Christ is put on display that he himself alone is enough to satisfy the human heart. "I don't need anything else. I don't need my loved one to come back from the dead. I don't need to know whether they're in heaven or hell. It is enough that Christ loves me, that he gave himself up for me, that he has secured heaven for me and he'll never let me go. That's enough for me to be full of joy. I don't need my body to get better to love him like that and for that to satisfy every longing of my heart. His grace is sufficient for me." And that kind of spiritual power is perfected when you are in weakness in the human life.

Paul goes on and Paul says this is so great he says in the middle of verse 9, he says, "This is so great, this is so true and real in my experience," that he goes to the other extreme. He had been praying for his weakness to be removed, now in verse 9 he says, "I'm glad I've got it. Most gladly, therefore," he says, "I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me." Verse 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."

Do you know how you appropriate that? Do you know how you make that real in your heart? You come back to this and you have to speak to yourself, you have to preach to yourself, you have to tell your own soul repeatedly that this grace that Christ has given to you in the moment is enough for you even if tomorrow is unknown and uncertain. "I don't know what tomorrow has, but do you know what?" you're saying to yourself, "But do you know what? Christ is with me now, Christ is with me in the moment, Christ loves me, Christ knows the number of hairs on my head, Christ has my soul in his hands, Christ is at the right hand of the Father interceding for me, representing me before a holy God. What have I to ask beside? I have Christ. I have all." And you tell that to your soul again and again again. "That's enough for me. That's what I need. I'm satisfied. I'm satisfied in Christ. I'm satisfied that he loves me. That's enough to bring peace and joy and comfort to my heart. His grace is enough to give me hope even when the future is unknown, even when it seems like life is on a decline that cannot be reversed." Sooner or later for most of us, that's going to be our experience and, beloved, we need to be ready when that comes and this is where our hope is, and as you do that over time, you cultivate a hope that cannot fail.

Look, anybody could have a positive attitude if they knew that healing was just around the corner for them. Anybody can have a positive attitude when life is exactly the way that they want it to be. There is nothing supernatural about that at all. What's supernatural, what glorifies God, what Christ is worthy of after all of the infinite work that he has done on your behalf is for you to look to him by faith and say, "You're enough for me. You're all that I need. You transcend this sorrow. You transcend this pain. You transcend this difficulty. I love you more than all else and it's enough for my heart to be satisfied in you, Lord Jesus." But that's not a one-time battle, that's what you tell yourself

multiple times throughout the day, that it would take root in your heart and give you hope.

Well, let me give you a fourth and final point that we've already alluded to here and that is this, that there is hope in heaven. There is hope in heaven. One of my primary complaints against those who are fascinated with bodily healing is that they have a completely earthbound approach to life and to sanctification, if you think about it. You know, if you think that God's only purpose when you're sick is for your immediate healing, you have a single dimension view of the purpose of life and everything is about the here-and-now and it's totally contrary to the spirit of the New Testament pointing us forward, drawing us forward ahead to glory and up toward God. "I want my body healed." Well, maybe there's something more than your body that's at stake. Maybe there's something more important, more transcendent than that. I would say to those propagators of that kind of stuff, I was trying really hard to think of a "p" word and nothing came so just resort to "stuff." Let's think about it this way, beloved, if it is God's will for everyone to be healed of all of their affliction, all that we could possibly conclude is that God has been a miserable failure for the past 6,000 years because there are a lot of ashes spread throughout the world, there are a lot of people dead in the bottom of the sea, there are a lot of cemeteries, a lot of places, somehow I get the idea that maybe physical healing isn't the big purpose of God in life. And you take it from that limited perspective, beloved, from their perspective within their worldview, those who teach these things, death always wins in the end. Death is undefeated and it will remain undefeated until Christ returns, undefeated except for the resurrection of Christ, you might say. What we're saying is this: sooner or later, beloved, the healing doesn't come and what then? What then? Then, for me, for you who embrace a biblical mindset about life, when we hear the fact that death is undefeated on earth save for the resurrection of Christ, nothing has to change about our worldview, nothing has to change about the way that we think about these things. You say, "Yeah, I know. I've accounted for that in the way that I think about life. God has purposes that transcend healing and death. Christ's salvation is more precious to me than life itself. I have grace for the moment that satisfies my heart even though I don't know what comes tomorrow. It's enough for me to be in his hand. That's enough for me."

Don't you see, beloved, don't you see this should be clenching in your mind the fact that in Christ we have something that is far more valuable than physical healing. We have the answer to life. To the one who believes in Christ, this is enough for everything. This keeps me anchored in prosperity, you say, "I'm not living for this world. Nice to have the stuff but it's not what I'm living for." This keeps me anchored when I'm laboring for breath knowing that death is imminent, "Christ is with me. In just a few short more moments, I'm going to be with him. Every point in between that which would cause my heart to flame in hope is real and it is unaltered by shifting circumstances. It is unaltered by broken bones or diseased organs that cannot be repaired."

Do you see it? Do you see it? Do you see it? This is what enables us to live life and what we see, then, is that true Christianity, true biblical faith soars above the time-bound thinking that says, "I've got to find physical healing." Well, what if the healing doesn't

come? Then what? Well, then God's plan, then Christ's salvation, then God's grace for today and then heaven.

Look at Philippians 3. You know, there's a sense in which we could say that for every Christian God does have healing for them, it's just not in this life. It's in the coming resurrection when we receive new bodies that are fit for heaven, that are fit for the presence of Christ, where we're transformed from this life into something new, not transformed simply for something that's going to die anyway.

Look at Philippians 3:17 as we try to bring this to a close. Paul says, "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us." Well, you know what Paul had said earlier in Philippians 1:21? Look at that real quickly with me. Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Gain. Verse 18 of chapter 3, he said, "For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who," what do they do? They "set their minds on earthly things." They set their minds on things that are temporal, that are limited to the matters between birth and death and that's what they think about and that's what they want. Paul says, "Christian, you live for something else, you live for a hope that's in heaven that long outlives the grave." Verse 20, "our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory," it's a future reality, not present, "by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself."

What do we do when the healing doesn't come? What do we think? Well, we think, "But this isn't even what I'm living for. It's not even about this earthly life. Illness does not have the final word over me. Death does not end the sentence on me. My hope is in heaven, not on earth. My hope is in the body that will be given to me at the resurrection, not the one that I have here, decrepit and failing here on this earth. I'm living for something else. I'm living for a hope that will be given to me certainly in heaven." And you rise above it all in your heart and your heart finds joy and contentment and your countenance finds a glow that is reflective of the glory of Christ within your heart that transforms and everyone who sees it says, "That is different than what I've seen before. That is outside the bounds of normal earthly experience. That person is joyful and content without healing."

I remember the first time I met Joni Eareckson Tada in her wheelchair. This goes back 32 years ago, 1986. I was just struck by the joy that animated her being, a joy that she would not have known had her spine not been broken in her diving accident. The body was broken to unleash a different kind of blessing to her and it is that spiritual blessing that can belong to everyone in the midst of their difficulties when the healing doesn't come. What can be our experience when the healing doesn't come? Victory, not defeat. Victory of soul. Victory of heart. Victory of spirit even if the body is crumbling.

Ian Murray describes the final hours of Martyn Lloyd-Jones's life like this in the second volume of his larger biographical work on the great doctor. It's such a great account. I've read that so many times. I'm going to quote him as he describes the final hours of Martyn Lloyd-Jones. He says, "At one point in these last few days when his speech had gone, as his daughter Elizabeth sat beside him, he pointed her very definitely to the words of 2 Corinthians 4:16 through 18." I'm going to read those for you here, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. Remember, this is the passage that a dying man took his daughter to when he could not speak and together they read this passage that says, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." That's the passage that they read, that the doctor pointed his daughter to him on his deathbed.

Elizabeth said later, "When I asked him if that was his experience now," what we just read in 2 Corinthians 4, "is that your experience now? He nodded his head with great vigor. The next evening in a shaky hand, the doctor wrote on a scrap of paper for the family, 'Do not pray for healing. Do not hold me back from the glory.'" And in his very poignant account, Ian Murray describes how the doctor fell asleep that night and Ian Murray concludes by saying this, what a great quote, "His next awakening was in the land of the blessed."

Beloved, that changes everything when the healing doesn't come. Death has lost its sting, 1 Corinthians 15. Beloved, look beyond your body. Look beyond this life. Look to your Redeemer because your Redeemer lives. Your Christ is in heaven and spiritually speaking, you have died and your life is hidden with him on high, Colossians 3. What do you do when the healing doesn't come? Three words, beloved, after 65 minutes, three words. What do you do when the healing doesn't come? Look to Christ.

Let's pray together.

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Father, make that great great love of thine, the surpassing affection of our hearts that tinges and colors the way that we look at everything else. Father, for those in the midst of physical suffering and the healing won't come, be added gracious to them in this hour. Bring added grace to their soul that would give them the hope that allows them to process the illness in a spirit of joy even as you comfort them in the midst of the physical affliction. Father, renew their heart day-by-day with the grace that you supply.

Father, perhaps finally at last your Spirit has opened the eyes of some who have been dead to Christ, dead to these things, and the mere discussion of death and the nature of Christian hope has shown them that they do not participate in this hope right now, lead them, Father, by the gracious loving, kind influence of your Spirit to the cross of Calvary

where they can be reconciled to God and find fellowship with you through faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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