

FACING SICKNESS WITH STRENGTH

John 9:1-12

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Last December our church experienced a Coronavirus outbreak. Just about every family in our church was affected. Some people felt it worse than others. My dad had to spend a few days in the hospital. I had to miss about a week and a half of work. It was miserable. It started with a really bad headache. Then I had fever. And then I lost my taste.
2. Sickness has been a part of the human experience ever since Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit.
 - i. In the fourteenth century, the Black Death (bubonic plague) killed an estimated one third to one half of Europe's population. MacArthur Bible Commentary
 - ii. In the nineteenth century, twice as many Civil War soldiers died of disease as were killed in combat. MacArthur Bible Commentary
 - iii. In the twentieth century, the influenza epidemic of 1918-19 claimed 30-50 million lives, dwarfing the number of those who died in the First World war. MacArthur Bible Commentary
 - iv. As of July 27, 611,000 people have died from COVID-19 in the United States, and 4,189,821 have died in the world.
3. Being sick can be a very tough experience; it can be the toughest experience. But as Christians we can face sickness with strength. We have resources that the rest of the world does not have. This morning I want us to think about how to face sickness with strength and grace and endurance and faith.

II. TEXT: John 9:1-12

1 As he was passing by, he saw a man blind from birth.

- i. This is the only miracle in the gospels in which a person was healed of a congenital condition.
- ii. But it is not the only time Jesus healed a blind person. He did that on several occasions.
- iii. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would open blind eyes (Is 42:7).

2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

- iv. Notice the question. The disciples assumed that sickness was the result of personal sin. That was the common belief at that time. We'll come back to this.

3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered. "This came about so that God's works might be displayed in him. 4 We must do the works of him who sent me

while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

- v. This man's blindness wasn't caused by his sin or his parents' sin. God allowed it for His glory. We'll come back to that.
- vi. Verse 4: "We must do the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work." The day referred to the time He had on earth. The night symbolized His death. Jesus knew that His death was only a few months away. He was saying that they need to maximize the time they had left while He was alive by serving God. This is true of all of us. We only have a limited amount of time. We can still serve God in heaven, but we cannot serve God on earth after we die. So we need to get busy serving the Lord. Stop procrastinating. Stop dragging your feet. If there's something that you want to do for God, then do it now.
- vii. Verse 5: "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." As long as Jesus was in the world, He was going to do God's work. That should be our attitude as well. As long as we are in this world, whether we are young or old, we are going to be the light of the world. We will serve Jesus.

6 After he said these things he spit on the ground, made some mud from the saliva, and spread the mud on his eyes. 7 "Go," he told him, "wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means "Sent"). So he left, washed, and came back seeing.

- viii. This is the third time that Jesus used His saliva in a miracle. He healed a deaf and mute man (Mk 7:33), and a blind man (Mark 8:23). But this is the only time that Jesus used His spit to make mud.
- ix. Why spit? It was believed back then that the spit of some very special people had healing properties. Faith is essential for healing, so some believe that Jesus knew that some people would be more inclined to believe Him if He used His saliva. But Jesus didn't need to use spit to heal. With some miracles He touched people, and with other miracles He just spoke a word.
- x. **William Barclay** "The fact is that Jesus took the methods and customs of his time and used them. He was a wise physician; he had to gain the confidence of his patient. It was not that he believed in these things, but he kindled expectation by doing what the patient would expect a doctor to do. After all, to this day the efficacy of any medicine or treatment depends to a certain extent on the patient's faith in it as well as in the treatment or the drug itself."
- xi. Jesus told the man to wash in the pool of Siloam. This pool has a very special story. Jerusalem was surrounded by a protective wall. When an army would attack, they lay siege to the city. They would surround it, not allowing anyone to get in or get out. Eventually the people would start dying of thirst and starvation and would surrender. Jerusalem's main water source was outside the city, the Gihon spring in the Kedron Valley. So, in the event of a

siege, the city was very vulnerable. Hundreds of years before Christ, when King Hezekiah heard that the Assyrians were planning to attack Jerusalem, he led his people to build an underground tunnel through the rock from the Gihon spring to the inside of the city. The tunnel was 583 yards long, six feet in height, and in some places only two feet wide, and it was 150 feet below the ground. The tunnel led to the pool of Siloam. The word Siloam meant “sent” because that’s where the water was sent. In the same way, Jesus is the water of life sent from God. He said in John 7:37, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.”

xii. So, the man washed himself and came back seeing.

8 His neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar said, “Isn’t this the one who used to sit begging?” 9 Some said, “He’s the one.” Others were saying, “No, but he looks like him.”

He kept saying, “I’m the one.”

10 So they asked him, “Then how were your eyes opened?”

11 He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So when I went and washed I received my sight.”

12 “Where is he?” they asked.

“I don’t know,” he said.

III. TWO IMPORTANT INSIGHTS ABOUT SICKNESS

1. Not all sickness is the result of personal sin.

- i. Jesus disciples’ just assumed that this man’s blindness was the result of his sin, or his parents’ sin. But Jesus said No. Neither.
- ii. We often misread sickness:
 1. Am I being punished?
 - a. When Job got sick, all three of his friends assumed it was because of his sin.
 - b. When Paul was bitten by the serpent in Malta, the locals concluded he must have been a murderer. Acts 28:3-6
 - c. Not necessarily.
 2. Am I going in the wrong direction?
 - a. “Surely if this was God’s will then it would be easy.”
 - b. Not necessarily.
 - c. Adoniram Judson was one of the first foreign American missionaries. He and his wife, Ann, were sent to the Burmese people in 1812. Just two years later his wife died of smallpox. Was that a sign from God that they should not have gone to Burma, that they should not have become missionaries? No. If that was the case then very little foreign mission work would ever get accomplished.

- d. When the Pilgrims came to America on the Mayflower seeking religious liberty, it was winter in New England. The first winter they lost 47 people to sickness, almost half their number. Was that a sign from God that they should not have left England? No. They persevered and eventually Plymouth, Massachusetts became a thriving colony where they could worship God freely.
- 3. Does God not care about me?
 - a. Of course He does. He loves you.
 - b. One of Jesus' best friends was Lazarus, and Lazarus got sick and died. His sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."
- 4. Does God not exist?
 - a. Some people assume that if there is a God who is all-powerful and all-good, then He wouldn't allow suffering. Since there is suffering, then God doesn't exist.
 - b. But the existence of suffering does not prove that God doesn't exist. It just proves that your assumptions and expectations of God are incorrect.
 - c. We know God exists, otherwise where did everything come from?
 - d. We know God is good because of the cross.
- iii. In the Bible we learn that we shouldn't read too much into sickness. Godly people get sick. Sinful people experience good health. So, we can conclude that sickness is not a sign of God's disfavor, and health is not a sign of God's favor.
- iv. There are four main reasons for sickness:
 - 1. Personal sin.
 - a. First, even though it is not the case in this story, there are times when sickness is a punishment for sin.
 - b. God punished King Jehoram of Judah for his wickedness. **2 Chronicles 21:15** "You yourself will be struck with many illnesses, including a disease of the intestines, until your intestines come out day after day because of the disease."
 - 2. Natural consequences of sin or foolishness.
 - a. If a smoker gets cancer, it's not God punishing them, it is just the natural consequences of smoking.
 - b. If an overweight person gets diabetes, it's not God punishing them, it's just the natural consequence of unhealthy living.
 - 3. Demonic oppression.

- a. The Bible attributes some sicknesses to demons. In the gospels we see demons causing disabilities, muteness, deafness, blindness, epilepsy, mental illness, etc.
4. The fall.
- a. Most sickness, however, is just a consequence of the fall. Before Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, there was no sickness or death. Sickness was not God's plan. But after they sinned, sickness entered into the picture, and now it is a part of the human experience.
 - b. Sickness is a reminder that we are sinful and in need of a Savior.
 - c. **Wells of Living Water** (Vol 9, Jn 1-20) "We are living in a world which is cursed with thorns and thistles. All nature is subject to sorrow and bondage, because of the fact of sin. Every hot wind, and every blasting frost; every hailstone, and everything else, in nature, that destroys and devastates is the result of sin and its curse. The thorns and the thistles are all in the world because sin is in the world. This, however, does not mean that everyone who is sick is personally living in sin. Even the redeemed are subject to the effects of Adam's sin and of the sins of others about them, so long as they are in the flesh."
 - v. Don't read too much into your sickness. It doesn't mean that God doesn't love you. It doesn't mean that God is punishing you. It could just be that you got sick because you are human and you live in a world that is cursed by sin.

2. God's purpose in all sickness is to glorify Himself.

- i. **John 9:3** "This came about so that God's works might be displayed in him."
- ii. This is not just true in the case of this man. God's purpose in all sickness is to glorify Himself, even when it is the consequence of sin.
- iii. How does God glorify Himself in sickness?
 - 1. Through healing. Healing leads us to praise God for His compassion and power.
 - 2. Through spiritual growth.
 - a. **Proverbs 20:30** "Lashes and wounds purge away evil, and beatings cleanse the innermost parts."
 - b. God uses sickness to turn us back to Him because good health makes it easy to forget God.
 - c. God uses sickness to grow our faith, because we have to trust that God is good and in control even when it feels like He isn't.
 - d. God uses sickness to grow our love, because we will feel more compassion for others when they are sick.
 - e. God uses sickness to make us long for heaven.

- f. God uses sickness to remind us that life is short and we need to get busy serving God.
- 3. Through comfort.
 - a. **2 Corinthians 1:4** “He comforts us in all our affliction”
 - b. When you get sick and seek God, He comforts you, and this causes you to love Him more.
- 4. Through spiritual strength.
 - a. When others observe your faith and grace in sickness, it glorifies God.
 - b. Job is the example here. The devil thought if he took away Job’s health that he would curse God, but he didn’t, and this glorified God.
- 5. Thorough spiritual protection.
 - a. Paul is the example here. God gave Paul a thorn in the flesh. Some believe it was a terrible eye disease. Prayed for healing, but God said, “No, this sickness helps you stay humble, and more useful to me.”
 - b. **2 Corinthians 12:9** “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.”
 - c. Sometimes we need sickness to help us to stay close to God.
- 6. Through spiritual direction.
 - a. God can use sickness to lead and guide us in life’s decisions.
 - b. As Paul was traveling on a missionary journey, his eye illness caused him to stop and preach to the Galatians. Many came to Christ because of that visit. If Paul wouldn’t have gotten sick, that may never have happened.
 - c. God leads us to where He wants us to go through sickness. God used Paul’s eye illness to cause him to stop and preach to the Galatians (Gal 4:13-15).
- iv. Here’s what we know about sickness. Not all sickness is the result of your sin. But, God wants to use your sickness to glorify Himself. So, let’s talk about how to respond to sickness.

IV. HOW TO RESPOND TO SICKNESS

- 1. Remember that God is in control, and He will use this for your good (Romans 8:28).
- 2. Have faith that God can heal you. Just as Jesus healed the blind man in John 9, He can heal you. God still heals. Miracles still happen.
- 3. Seek relief.
 - i. Through repentance. It is possible that your sickness is discipline for sin, so start by examining your life and repenting of all sin.
 - ii. Through prayer.
 - 1. Pray for yourself.

- a. King Asa of Judah is criticized in the Bible because when he developed a severe disease in his feet, but he did not seek the Lord but only physicians (2 Chron 16:12).
 - b. King Hezekiah is a better example. When he fell ill the prophet Isaiah told him that he would not recover; this was going to kill him. But he prayed for healing and God healed him and added fifteen more years to his life (2 Chron 20:1-11).
 - 2. Solicit the prayers of others (James 5:13-18).
 - iii. Through medicine.
 - 1. It is not a lack of faith to seek the help of physicians.
 - 2. It is not a lack of faith to pray for God to provide and also go to work, or to pray for a good grade but also study hard.
 - iv. Through Snickers bars. My daughter Carter added this to my sermon when I was away from the computer. She has a good point.
4. Don't expect complete healing in this life.
- i. Isaiah 53:5, "we are healed by his wounds," is often quoted by Charismatics as support for the belief that Christ promises to heal our sicknesses as Christians.
 - 1. Joseph Prince says that physical healing is the right of every Christian, and we can just claim it and confess it into reality.
 - 2. This false doctrine is taught by all the famous faith healers – Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagin, Joyce Meyer.
 - 3. Tell that to my cousin Catherine who has had spina bifida since she was born, and she is a Christian who loves Jesus. Does she not have enough faith?
 - 4. Writing for GTY.org (the online ministry of John MacArthur), **Cameron Buettel** said, "That's a cruel doctrine to inflict on Christians who have sought healing but continue to spend their lives in wheelchairs, on respirators, and under medication. The belief that Christ's physical suffering somehow guarantees our physical healing in this life isn't merely an abuse of Scripture—it's a form of mental and spiritual torture to those who sit under such false teaching. It's a lie that has left many churchgoers disappointed with the gospel. Rather than longing for their heavenly home, they are gripped by unrealized expectations in the here and now. The sickness they struggle with leaves them feeling like failures who lack the necessary faith to claim the healing that's rightfully theirs. The fact that everyone still dies should be proof enough that on this side of eternity all people are still subject to Adam's curse. Sickness is a very real part of life in this fallen world, and no amount of claiming divine health is going to change that. Even the disciples of the early church didn't rebuke their

physical ailments into oblivion—they dealt with them as best they could like everybody else.”

5. The healing in Is 53:5 was fulfilled during the earthly ministry of Christ. Mt 8:16-17 says that Christ’s healing ministry was the fulfillment of Is 53:5. Remember that the prophets said that the Messiah would heal the sick. Jesus fulfilled this. But after Christ’s earthly ministry, the healing promised to us is spiritual, not physical. However, it is physical in the next life.
 - ii. Paul was unable to heal his associate Trophimus. **2 Timothy 4:20** “Erastus has remained at Corinth; I left Trophimus sick at Miletus.”
 - iii. When Paul God sick with his thorn in the flesh, he prayed for healing three times but God did not take it away (2 Cor 12:7-10).
 - iv. Paul wrote to Timothy and told him to drink wine to help him with his frequent stomach problems (1 Tim 5:23).
 - v. Epaphroditus got so sick he almost died (Phil 2:25-27).
 - vi. Those who claim that Christians should never get sick should also claim that Christians should die, because the Bible says that Christ conquered death (2 Tim 1:10). But of course this means that death will not be the end; we will wake up in eternal life with Christ.
 - vii. Remember that our prayers are subordinate to God’s will. When we pray, we must always say like Christ, “Yet not my will, but Yours be done.”
 - viii. Chip Ingram talks about different views of healing on today’s religious landscape:
 1. The faith healers. They claim to have a special gift of healing. They should go to the hospitals.
 2. Confessionalists. The name and claim it group. All healing is guaranteed by the cross. You just have to believe it and receive it. Name it and claim it. Speak your healing into reality. If you don’t get healed, it’s your fault.
 3. Anti-supernaturalists. Miracles don’t exist.
 4. Rationalists. Christian Science/Mary Baker Eddie. Sickness and death are illusions. They are in your minds. If you simply get your thinking right then you can clear up these “appearances of sickness.”
 5. Biblical realists: God does and can heal, but He doesn’t heal everyone in this life. He has different purposes and plans for sickness in each person.
5. Look forward to complete healing in heaven.
 - i. In heaven God will wipe away every tear from your eyes (Rev 21:3).
 - ii. There will be no more death (Rev 21:4).
 - iii. There will be no more grief, crying, or pain (Rev 21:4).
6. Cheer up.

- i. Proverbs 17:22 “A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones.”
 - ii. It is tempting to let depression sink in when you are sick, but ask the Lord to help you to be joyful, and it will make the sickness more bearable.
- 7. Care for the sick.
 - i. When it is others who are sick, remember God’s mandate to care for them.
 - ii. Jesus said this is a mark of those who are truly saved.
 - iii. Matthew 25:35-36 “35 ‘For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me.’
- 8. Ask, “How can I glorify God in this?”
 - i. You don’t need to ask, “Why is this happening to me?” You already know. It is happening for the glory of God.
 - ii. So, ask, “How can I glorify God in this?”
 - iii. What does He want to teach me?
 - iv. How can I use this to serve Him?
 - v. How can I use this to grow?

V. CONCLUSION

1. The week that I wrote this sermon, one of my old friends died of illness. Ruth Bringol died of COVID-19. Another of my old friends, Glen Rhineheart, was on his last leg battling pancreatic cancer. These were two of the most devout and mature Christians that I’ve ever met. They loved the Lord, they loved the church, they loved God’s people, and they had deep faith. They prayed long and hard for healing. Their friends and family prayed long and hard for healing. Yet both of them died.
2. Not all sickness ends in death. Most of the time the Lord heals us. But sometimes sickness lingers, and eventually sickness kills us.
3. But the good news is that God can get the glory from our sickness if we will respond rightly. And when we die we will receive complete and total healing and relief from all sickness and suffering.