

## Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

June 26, 2018

If you or someone you love has ever been sick—and I'll bet this has happened many times—I'd be very surprised if you haven't also prayed nearly as often for God to heal that illness, injury, or disease. I certainly do this myself.

I think about such things all the time, since our daughter, Anna, suffers from several humanly-incurable genetic diseases; and these thoughts have taken on increased intensity in the past month as two staff members from previous churches have died out of season from disease.

When we think about asking God for physical and other healing, it seems to me that there is a common misunderstanding about praying for healing that usually leads to making the sufferer feel worse, not better. The unfortunate result of this persistent misunderstanding is that we end up "blaming the victim" for their suffering.

Three passages, in particular, lend themselves to this misunderstanding, and the mistake to which these passages lead is the idea that if we "just have enough faith," God will give us what we want, especially when our desire is for some kind of healing:

*And if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer (Matthew 21:22).*

*Therefore I tell you, everything you pray and ask for—believe that you have received it and it will be yours (Mark 11:24).*

*Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church, and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up; if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect (James 5:14-16).*

**The problem is that our own experience does not support the apparent meaning of these verses.** While spontaneous remissions of disease do sometimes occur, and while these sometimes may in fact be granted in response to prayer, *these remissions are the exception, not the rule.*

*Healings and remissions certainly do not come as routinely as these three passages would lead us to expect, and much that promises the expectation of routine healing is deceitful and manipulative. Consequently, when our friends and fellow church members do not experience the kind of healing they desire (which is nearly always), the unspoken (and sometimes spoken) conclusion is that "You do not have enough faith."*

It seems to me that there are a number of principles that help us with this conundrum. First of all, we need to remember that in order to properly understand the meaning of any verse, we have to consider the teaching of the whole of Scripture, especially the New Testament. It's very important to interpret passages that are less clear in the light of passages that are clearer.



Further, it should be apparent that *unless Jesus comes back sooner, all of us are going to physically die, and we have to die from some cause.* **If every prayer for healing brought healing, there wouldn't be many deaths!**

We also need to remember that **not every sickness and not every death is God's will or God's purpose.** You and I do many things that lead to disease and that shorten our own lives.

And it's important to bear in mind that **God is glorified, and sinners are drawn to Jesus far more often by how Christians suffer and die than by how we are miraculously healed.** Finally, we need to remember that *this persistent misunderstanding of the New Testament's teaching about healing causes huge numbers of persons to turn away from faith in Jesus.*

An important text that helps to clarify this confusion is Paul's statement in 2 Timothy 4:20 that **"I left Trophimus sick at Miletus."** God had already used Paul to heal the sick, cast out demons, and raise the dead. **If it is always God's purpose to heal the sick, why did Paul not heal Trophimus?** The answer is that **physical healing is not always God's "highest good" in our lives;** and we frequently see what God is up to only in retrospect, or from the perspective of eternity.

Our Lord Himself was well aware that God's purposes and those things that serve to advance God's kingdom are often very different from our wishes and desires. As Jesus approached the cross, He told His disciples, *"Now my soul is troubled. What should I say—Father, save me from this hour? But that is why I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name"* (John 12:27-28).

It is not wrong to pray for healing. When I'm sick, when persons I care about are sick, I am most certainly going to ask God for healing. But the most important thing I will pray is what Jesus prayed:

**"Father, glorify your Name!"**

That's what I've been thinking about lately, but I don't claim special inspiration for these observations and will be glad to hear how you think about such things.

Live under the Mercy,

Dave

**"Father, Glorify  
Your Name"**

John 12:27-36