

## **The Health of My Countenance**

(a sermon about sickness and health)

Psalm 42: 5, 11,

Septuagesima Sunday February 1, 2015

Beloved of the Lord.....It is very sad but true, our happiness in life is very closely tied to our health. If our loved ones and we are healthy, we are happy, but if our loved ones and we are sick and suffering, we are usually sad and depressed. What happens to our body usually touches our soul. Today's sermon therefore is about sickness and health. It is about the path God chooses for us, which is a cross of suffering, though in the end it leads to glory. As we begin the sermon today and consider our sickness, let us remember verse one of Hymn #529. I leave all things to God's direction, He loveth me in weal and woe; His will is good, true His affection, With tender love His heart doth glow. My Fortress and my Rock is He: What pleaseth God, that pleaseth me.

I. Hope thou in God, who is the health of my countenance. Of course let us begin today by remembering all sickness is a foretaste of death. It is because we are all sinners, born in sin, that our bodies eventually must die. Therefore when we are healthy or young or in the beauty and prime of our life, we should not glory in this or think we are strong. We are still miserable sinners who will die because of our sin. The Bible says "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." When we grumble and complain about being sick, let us learn to hold our tongue, for Jesus did not grumble and complain on the cross, when He was being punished for our sins. He accepted God's will and suffered accordingly that our souls be ransomed from Satan and death's power. Since we merit the eternal punishments of hell for our sins, and yet Christ has delivered us from such, we should never despise God's chastening, but humbly accept it and continue to repent of our sins and believe in Christ. The Bible says, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." Jesus also said "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

While all of us are quite accustomed to sickness, so that by experience we don't sweat the little things like the flu, or colds, it is quite different when the illness is more serious, especially life-threatening. We are used to life. We are used to living. And though death is all around us so we are comfortably numb to it most of the time, when a serious illness befalls us, then the real temptations set in. Sometimes they are quite strong and we begin to despair. It is very easy to talk about faith and trust, and Christ, heaven, and salvation, nevertheless it is entirely different when inwardly we have to wrestle with thoughts of death, and inwardly we think about actually dying. Then the arrows of Satan fly. Will I keep the faith and trust in Jesus all the way to the end? What happens if the pain is great and I cannot bear it? Am I sure that I am a believer? Can I really be certain God has forgiven me? What if God is angry with me now for something I have done and I don't know it and must figure it out? I can't stand the thought of dying and leaving my family behind for I love them so much. Will Jesus really take me to heaven? If He is a

God of love, why don't I feel love for Him now in return? Why do I fear Him, when I know I should love Him? What if I haven't really repented of my sins but only deceived myself? What if there is something lacking which I have not done yet? I feel so guilty because I constantly worry about this and I know that is wrong but I can't seem to stop. Where is my faith and trust, and why is it so hard when it should be easy? Why can't I trust and believe as I should, for I know death has been conquered by Christ yet I am so afraid! Why can't I stop being afraid! When we are sick and suffering, these are often the thoughts that plague our soul. Note well then the words of our Psalm today, for you will see a man wrestling in faith with his own soul. He is speaking in faith trying to calm down his own soul saying: Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.

When our soul thus is troubled by earthy sickness, we need to speak to our soul by faith saying to our soul, "Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance." To hope in God is to put your trust in Him knowing HE WILL SURELY HELP, though we cannot see Him or feel Him. So the Bible says, "Let us therefore come BOLDLY unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. Now is not a time to be afraid, therefore remember Christ the Rock, your Fortress, who is also the anchor of the soul. And here take comfort for the psalmist says there is help in the countenance of God, namely you will find help in His face! This means God's face is smiling upon us, just as we hear in the benediction every Sunday. "The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make His face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace." This is a Gospel blessing given by God to you every Sunday when you hear and listen. This means for Jesus' sake, your Heavenly Father has only a smile for you, and His smile is an outward reflection of His inward heart which gives you peace. Having forgiven you all your sins through Jesus, God surely takes no pleasure then in your suffering, but in the midst of your sickness surely God wants you to know you are still His precious child, by that smile, His face, His countenance. You don't have to know specifically why you are sick, but God wants you to know He has allowed this for your spiritual benefit, and in the long run your faith will be increased. Do not then glory in worldly things, nor should you worry about this sickness which God has allowed, "But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD."

Consider then all the health choices and decisions we must make in life. Which doctor will we use, and should we have that operation? Which medicine is best for us, and which drug should we avoid? What diet should we use, or which foods should we reject? Should we go the natural route or take the path of Western medicine? On top of all this we have various doctors with competing theories and solutions. Who is right and who is wrong and how do we know which path to choose? The simple answer here is that the choice we make is not that important, for God can bless or hinder either path we choose, but it is very important that we choose and proceed in faith, trusting God will prosper and bless according to His good and gracious will. Hence "I leave all things to

God's direction, He loveth me in weal and woe; His will is good, true His affection, With tender love His heart doth glow."

Take for example David and Goliath when they were about to battle. Do you think David's choice of weapon was all that important? If David decided to use a spear rather than a slingshot would the outcome be different? That battle was not about David's choice of weapon, but the battle was about God's glory and David's faith. God blessed and rewarded David's faith because the battle was about God's glory, and David believed that. God would be glorified by the death of Goliath. Trembling Israel, trembling sheep would become stronger in faith. When you therefore make a health decision in life, God has given you Christian liberty to choose which medicine, method, diet or doctor to use, but don't put your faith in your slingshot. Neither place your hopes in "positive thinking". Put your faith in your mighty and gracious God who has promised to fight all battles for you, and deliver you from every evil and take you to heaven when you die, for Jesus sake. Therefore "hope thou in God" and "praise him for the help of his countenance." Your sickness which God has allowed, is God's own operation, an exercise of His love if you receive it in the right way, for it comes only from His grace. God is not just your Good Shepherd, but also your Good Doctor who knows what He is doing. This is for His glory, won't you then accept it and glorify Him by patiently suffering through it?

II. Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God. Compare then verse 5 and 11 of our text and notice they are nearly identical, yet different. Verse five says "Hope thou in God...for the help of His countenance", and verse eleven says "Hope thou in God...who is the health of my countenance, and my God!" Isn't that beautiful? Finding help in His countenance causes a change in our own countenance. His gracious face with a smile causes us to smile toward Him in return, and be spiritually happy, spiritually at peace! Jesus is the HEALTH of MY COUNTENANCE, and my God! How glorious!

Therefore dear child of God, "Hope thou in God" and do not sweat this "little sickness" even if it leads to death, for all that God allows us on earth, even all suffering, is like a cure that delivers every sick patient to heaven. These earthly sicknesses truly are God's medicine, even spiritual medicine, and it is a higher path, which leads to Zion's gates above us. You walk that higher path, when you make your health decisions knowing "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose." This is about God's glory, not mine. And if still you struggle, then think on Jesus, and remember His good will. What was His good will in Luke 9:51? The Bible says, "And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem." Jerusalem was on His mind constantly, because in His heart Christ yearned to save mankind from sin by suffering on the cross. Hebrews 12:2 is much the same, for it tells us why Jesus went to the cross: "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross." This means before the cross Jesus looked beyond the cross, seeing the great prize which awaited, OUR SALVATION, OUR DELIVERANCE FROM EVERY SIN WHICH WOULD HAVE DAMNED US.

Jesus saw life after death, even life everlasting for you and me, and Jesus approached His own death to conquer death and give everlasting life to all. "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

What then does it matter whatever our sickness or illness may be?.....even if it leads to death? Can any man or woman or child really be sick, when they are God's dear children by faith in Christ? Don't we through Jesus possess life everlasting even now by faith? How then can we be sick? We are not sick but we are healed from all sin and iniquity. Neither are we dead or dying, for we possess Christ and the life of Christ by faith. We have life everlasting, which no man can take away. Therefore do not fear this conquered enemy which we call death, for Jesus rose from the dead on the third day saying, "Because I live, ye shall live also." It is not death to die, but death brings life everlasting. Therefore, as our hymn says, God knows what must be done to save me, His love for me will never cease; Upon His hands He did engrave me, With purest gold of loving grace. His will supreme must ever be: What pleaseth God, that pleaseth me." Amen.