



October 18, 2009

## *The Blessings Of Sickness*

That's an odd title isn't it. After all, what blessings are there in being ill and experiencing the problems that disease and chronic health issues bring? Over the years I have met some folks who have had relatively good health. They have experienced the occasional seasonal malady, but for the most part their lives have not been touched by serious illness or disease that may lead to a chronic condition. Yet. Sooner or later there will be a time when we all face the effects of a physical downturn. Some who have not dealt with such issues have trouble understanding and being compassionate toward those who struggle with ailments their personal genetic predispositions have presented. In the absence of such difficulties we may develop attitudes that are lacking when it comes to the most important aspects of life. We are vulnerable to a variety of afflictions and this is just part of being human, but there are blessings in these that can help us focus on what is truly important. Illness and health problems remind us that we are subject to forces beyond our control and this is one thing that helps undo pride. I have known people who have not experienced any ongoing health issues and they have a particularly negative view of others who have problems. These individuals see others as weak or flawed and view themselves as being superior. The undoing of pride is one function of illness. The apostle Paul had been afflicted with an ailment for which he prayed for relief. ***“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”*** ( 2 Cor 12.7-9). In his humility Paul knew that he was dependent on God. He also learned that he could perform the will of God no matter what happened as the Lord would be with him. To the Philippians he wrote, ***“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have***

***learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”*** (Phil 4.11). Paul abandoned power and position in the Jewish nation and was ahead of the accomplishments of many others. Seeing his zeal and knowing his heart, Paul was called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. During his work as an apostle he endured many physical afflictions. He faced those with the knowledge that God was his strength and he was willing to follow the example of Christ who divested himself of all things and endured the sufferings of the flesh to show us that the world can be overcome. Paul writes, ***“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”*** (Phil 2.5-8). The writer of Hebrews describes Christ in a similar fashion. ***“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”*** (Heb 4.14-15). The writer refers to the temptations and complications of life and we don't often think of illness as a temptation but it is. Prolonged illness may cause us to wonder about God, his love and his blessings. We may question what we really believe in. Some may decide to give up. Others will accept the struggle and continue on, being as faithful as they are physically able to. Those who surrender to the effects of disease and disability may become depressed and fall into despair. God has the ability to lift us out of these things if we are concentrating on him. And that leads to a final point. Health problems continually remind us that there is a better place to go. We find it easier to part with the world and look forward to a new home where sickness and death do not exist.

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