

Straying from Truth, part 1
June 3, 2018

Last week we finished a series of sermons on some reasons for pain and suffering as revealed in the Bible. We looked at three reasons. First, God uses pain and suffering to develop the right character in us. A second reason is to discipline us, to call us to repent from sin. And a third reason for pain and suffering is persecution at the hands of non-Christians.

Of all the Bible does say about sickness, there is one thing it does not say. It does not say that God WILL heal us. It reveals that God CAN heal us. But God does not promise to heal us of all of our pain and suffering.

Yet, there are some Christians who teach otherwise. They distort this aspect of the Christian life. They don't teach a false salvation. It isn't the gospel they get wrong. But they teach that God promises to heal us of all sickness. I will show in God's word that this is false teaching.

We are going to look at the Bible passages that some use to support their claims. The first one is in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 7:15 (NIV) The Lord will keep you free from every disease. He will not inflict on you the horrible diseases you knew in Egypt...

Conveniently, those who preach that God promises to heal us of all diseases only read the first part of this verse. They lift the first sentence out of its context. They ignore the surrounding statements that clarify what God promises. The context reveals three things that the false teachers ignore.

1. God promised protection from specific physical ailments, the ones they experienced in Egypt.

God was not making a blanket statement about every disease in the world. The second part of the verse qualifies what diseases he is speaking of. He is speaking specifically of the diseases they had experienced in Egypt over the last 400 years. These are described in Deuteronomy 28.

Deuteronomy 28:27 (NIV) The Lord will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, festering sores and the itch, from which you cannot be cured.

Here, God is warning that He will use the diseases they knew in Egypt to discipline them when they break their covenant with God. These are the specific diseases that God is promising to protect them from in Dt. 7:15. He is not promising to heal them of any sickness in the world. He is only promising to protect them from the ones they knew in Egypt.

Another reason we know God did not mean any sickness is because God mentions other illnesses in the law of Moses. God commanded them of what to do when they experienced leprosy and other skin diseases. (Leviticus 14:1-32; Deut. 24:8)

Deuteronomy 24:8 (NIV) In cases of leprous diseases be very careful to do exactly as the priests, who are Levites, instruct you. You must follow carefully what I have commanded them.

There is no connection of this sickness to sin as there is in the Deuteronomy 28 passage. This is illness other than those mentioned there. God would not promise the prevention of all diseases if He expected them to have leprosy. No, again, he was not making a promise of all sicknesses in 7:15, but only those they experienced in Egypt.

2. God's actual promise was to prevent these illnesses, not heal them once they were sick.

Preventing a disease is a very different promise from healing a disease a person already has contracted. God promised to keep them from such diseases, not heal them.

3. God made this promise to Israelites under the old covenant, not Christians under the new covenant.

Some Christians misread this promise as applying to Christians. This promise is NOT made to Christians, but to Jews under the old covenant. Christians relate to God under the new covenant. This promise is not part of our covenant with God. Remember that the "T" in OT and NT stands for testament. And a testament means a covenant.

So Deuteronomy 7:15 is not a promise that God will heal Christians of all their diseases. Another passage that is misapplied by false teaching is Psalm 103:1-3.

Psalm 103:1-3 (NIV) Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits-- who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,

Notice that he is saying "my soul" in verses one and two and then says "your" in verse three. But he is still speaking about himself. In verse three he is talking to himself and he says "Self, God forgives your sins and heals your diseases."

1. He is not making a general statement about anyone else. He is speaking of what he personally had experienced at the hands of God. He had experienced God's forgiveness of his, David's, sin.

2. He is using, in verse 3, a technique of Hebrew poetry known as parallelism. When he says "forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases" he is using parallelism. Verse 3 has two back-to-back phrases. David is restating in the second phrase, with different words, what he has just said in the first phrase. He used the word "diseases" in the second phrase, as a synonym for sins. He is not writing of physical illness but of spiritual illness. There are many examples of parallelism in the Psalms, Proverbs, and some of the prophets. (Two other examples are in the first two verses of Psalm 114.)

David is speaking of sin as if it were a disease that God heals him of. He is not saying that God healed all of his physical ailments. Despite David's grievous sins, God had forgiven him. God kept hold of David. God would not let him go. David had learned to seek God's presence and had experienced the same. We all need this.

One woman told of her daughter's prayer for God's presence. "One night my 11-year-old daughter Eva noticed I was distracted as I tucked her in to bed. I told her about a friend's teenage daughter whose hair was mysteriously falling out and I encouraged Eva to pray for Amy. Her simple prayer touched me. She prayed, 'Jesus, please hold Amy's hair on her head.' As the doctors experimented with different treatments, Amy continued to lose her hair. Eva continued to pray the same prayer. After six weeks the doctors determined Amy had alopecia, an extremely rare disorder where hair loss is unpredictable and can be complete and permanent. When I told Eva, she took my hand and closed her eyes. This time her prayer was different. 'Dear Jesus, if you won't hold Amy's hair on her head, would you please hold Amy?' "

And He does. God has not promised to heal our every ailment. But He has promised to hold us. He has promised to be with us. He loves us. And as proof of this He sent His son to save us. There are several passages in the prophets that foretold the coming of our Savior. The following is one of them and is another miss-taught passage. Isaiah 52 and 53 tell of the coming "servant of the Lord."

Isaiah 53:5 (NIV) But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Jesus says that this verse was fulfilled in Himself. It says nothing about healing of diseases and illness. The word healed refers back to the word iniquities. By the wounds of Jesus, the death of Jesus on the cross, we are healed of our iniquities, our sins.

The next miss-taught passage is in the New Testament. This is Jesus speaking.

John 14:12 (NIV) I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

Some take this "greater things" to mean healing of physical ailments. It does not say that specifically. And in fact there is little evidence of such a meaning. If Jesus meant that we would be doing the kinds of miracles he did, why don't we see them happening? There are some in our church with chronic illness that we would like to see healed. But despite our prayers they are still suffering.

And these are illnesses we are talking about. Jesus also healed the blind, the lame, the deaf. We don't see such miracles taking place today. Nor do we see much of such miracles done by the apostles in the New Testament. Look at the next three passages, evidence that the apostles could not heal all diseases.

1 Timothy 5:23 (NIV) Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.

How come Timothy suffered from frequent stomach problems? Why didn't Paul just heal him of these? Why didn't Jesus heal him if such was his promise?

2 Timothy 4:20 (NIV) Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.

Why didn't Paul heal Trophimus so he could accompany Paul to Corinth?

Philippians 2:25-27 (NIV) But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus... whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died.

It is obvious that Epaphroditus got well. But it does not say he was miraculously healed. In fact, the report that he almost died sounds as if it got worse before it got better. Why, if Paul could heal any disease did these things happen? The evidence points to the Apostles not being able to heal anyone of anything.

I do not believe that the "greater things" Jesus spoke of meant the miracles he did. Jesus did heal people, all kinds of healing, but that is not why he came. His message was never, "Come and be healed!" His message was about the kingdom. Jesus' preaching message was to prepare people for the kingdom of God.

**Jesus preached the good news of the near arrival of the kingdom of God.
(Matthew 4:23; Matthew 9:35)**

Jesus taught that the kingdom of God was almost arrived. It would arrive with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit after the ascension of Jesus to heaven. As part of his message Jesus told people to prepare for the arrival of the kingdom by repenting of their sins and being baptized with the baptism of John.

Jesus did not preach the forgiveness of all sin by faith in his death and resurrection. He did not preach that message. Jesus preached a preparation for that message.

We preach atonement for all sin by faith in Jesus' death and resurrection.

The greater things that we do than Jesus is preaching the good news of salvation. It is all through the book of Acts.

**Acts 10:36 (NIV) You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.
(Acts 5:42; 8:12; 8:35; 11:20; 17:18)**

We preach a greater message than Jesus did. He taught Jews in preparation for the coming kingdom. We teach all people how to be admitted to that kingdom that has now arrived. Permanent atonement with God is a greater message than Jesus shared. It is greater than healing someone of blindness. The greater works that Jesus speaks of is the church spreading the good news of salvation. And we are doing this in countries all over the world. Jesus never left the land of Israel. We are preaching a greater message and taking it farther than Jesus ever went. It is the good news of the healing of our sin. That is by far a better message than physical healing.

Jesus came to heal us of sin. He died to pay the penalty for our sin. When we become a Christian he saves us from the power of sin over us. And when he returns, He will free us from the presence of sin in us. Jesus came to heal ALL of our sin problems, not all of our physical problems.

Sure, it would be nice if we were like Moses. Moses lived 120 years and was as strong and healthy at 120 as he was at 40. That would be nice. But it is not God's plan for us. He does not promise it. And we should not expect it.

His plan was for Jesus to come and save us from our sins. That, in fact is why he was named Jesus. Read again what the angel told Joseph about Mary and the baby.

Matthew 1:21 (NIV) She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

(John 1:29; Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-3; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; 1 John 3:5)

The name Jesus means Yah saves. Yah is a shortened form of Yahweh, God's personal name. God loves us so much he sent us the savior we needed. Jesus came to save us from our sins. All His promises to us in Christ Jesus are about spiritual blessings, not physical blessings.

This is the healing message of the Bible. This is the healing message God has for you today. You can be healed of your sin problem. That is why Jesus came. We invite you to say "Yes" to this healing today.