Pain...

I don’t question that it is a blessing from God. I have no doubt that we learn great lessons from pain & that it often alerts us to disease or problems that need to be addressed. I know that to live without the ability to feel pain would be a curse instead of a blessing. Without pain one would not be able to know when they have broken a bone or burned their hand or have something in their eye that needs to come out. I understand the curse of diseases which remove the ability to feel pain in their limbs. I’ve read the books which describe ones with leprosy having toes eaten off by rats while they felt no pain.

But what about the other side of the problem? What about having pain that just won’t go away?

Having lived for several years with the constant pain of cluster headaches along with a variety of other ailments that refuse to go away, I think I have some perspective to offer on this subject. Many people have migraines or other such headaches. Imagine having that headache every day from the time you get up to the time you go to sleep at night & you begin to see the idea. Please understand I’ve tried every treatment available, having spent weeks in headache clinics in Houston, Chicago & a few others in between. Besides the medicines I’ve had two major surgeries to try to bring relief. Nothing has helped.

Everyone seems to have a cure. Most know someone with the same problem & what worked to cure them. Multitudes of people have prayed that God would relieve the pain. Often, I’ve cried out to God about it, many of those times asking, “Why?” When people tell me of some problem they had & how they prayed & God healed them quickly, I’m glad for them. But I do wonder why, if it worked so well for them, it hasn’t worked for me.

You may be thinking it is just a lack of faith. If you really believed, God would answer and heal you. I’ve certainly thought that myself.

But my situation isn’t unique at all. If it were, I’d keep my thoughts to myself. The truth is there are multitudes of people who struggle, some quietly, others loudly, with constant pain. They have just as much faith as any of the ones who have prayed & been made well, but their pain remains. They’re like the woman who had the problem with hemorrhaging who had spent all she had on doctors & was no better. She thought if she could just touch the hem of the Lord’s garments she would be made well. She did & she was.

But what about all those cases where we prayed fervently, with faith, & the person didn’t get well, but died? What about all the times we’ve prayed for folks, but their pains & ailments simply kept getting worse day after day? Does God have a word for those of us who didn’t recover or didn’t find any relief?

NOT ALL WERE EVER HEALED

One reminder I need is that even in the day of miracles, when so many sick were healed, there were many who were not healed.

Timothy was a good man. Paul said of him that he didn’t have anyone else like him who naturally cared for others (Philippians 2:19-21). But Timothy had stomach problems that didn’t go away. In 1 Timothy 5:23 Paul said, “Don’t continue drinking only water, but use a little wine because of your stomach & your frequent illnesses.” Why couldn’t Paul just heal Timothy?

Epaphroditus was a faithful servant. But when he was in Rome to help Paul he became sick & almost died. Paul sent him back to his people, thankful that God had spared his life (Philippians 2:25-30). Trophimus was a faithful servant. Yet Paul left him in Miletus sick (2 Timothy 4:20).

And what about Paul himself? He came to Galatia to preach in his time of physical problems. He praised the people because they accepted him, even in the time of his weakness, as an angel from God, & would have torn out their own eyes & given them to him if possible (Galatians 4:13-16).

In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul describes those physical weaknesses as a thorn in the flesh, a minister of Satan. He said he prayed about it three times for God to remove the thorn. But God revealed to him that he wouldn’t take it away because His strength was made perfect in weakness. He shouted that he would now glory in his weaknesses, knowing that when he was weak was when he was strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

But why does God heal some of the sicknesses & some of the people of their problems & pains, but not others? That was a lot of the question that Job asked of God. God reminded Job of who He was & of His power, but never explained why He allowed Job to go through all the agony he did.

SOME OBSERVATIONS

I don’t know why God chooses to heal some & not others. I don’t know why in some cases a church prays in response to James 5:13-16 in those times of sickness & the prayer of faith heals the sick, but that at other times the same people praying with the same faith get the answer, “No”. But I have no doubt that God has a reason. He just doesn’t choose to reveal all His reasons to us all the time.

We need to remember that we are just clay pots & the treasure is what is inside, not the pot. Paul writing to the Corinthians said, “Now we have this treasure in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power may be from God & not from us. We are pressured in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed
but not in despair; we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed. We always carry the death of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” (2 Corinthians 4:7-11)

Then he continued by saying, “Therefore we do not give up; even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen; for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (4:16-18)

Part of our problem is that we are altogether too focused on the here & now. We think too much about this life & this physical body. The important part of us is what is renewed daily, even when the body is decaying.

This life, at best is so brief. Just think that whatever we go through down here, in comparison to eternity, is light & momentary. The real tragedy is for one to lift up their eyes in an eternal hell when this life is over, where the agony has no end, the despair has no relief & the torment cannot be comforted. If I hurt every day of this short life, but then awaken one day in glory with an immortal, incorruptible body, made like Jesus’ body, to live, rest, & be led by the Lord by the everlasting springs of water, with God wiping away every tear that falls, I won’t care what I went through to get there.

Perhaps it is in the suffering that we are able best to show the beauty of the Lord in our lives. If every person who came to God was healed, & carried on beds of ease throughout life, it would draw people to God who only wanted to live the life of ease. They would come for the healing, the health & the wealth.

Our God comforts us in all our troubles so that we may be able to comfort others in whatever troubles they go through in life (2 Corinthians 1:3). It is the scars that shout to the world, we serve a God who will lead us through the valley of the shadow of death & we won’t be afraid knowing He is there with us. He doesn’t take away the valley, the shadow or the death. He walks beside us & gives us strength to go on.

Today, if you look at life & feel frustrated that you have asked God over & over again to take away your hurts & they are still there, just as bad as or worse than ever, don’t give up or give in to the devil. Remember your afflictions are working for you. They work to prepare you an even greater glory when this life is through. We aren’t here just for now. We live for eternity.

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