

Bodily and spiritual health compared (Quality: Very Good)

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[0 : 00] In dependence upon the Lord, I ask your prayerful attention to the second book of Samuel, chapter 20, and part of verse 9.

The second book of Samuel, chapter 20, and a question in verse 9. I'll read the 9th and 10th verses to give you the context.

And Joab said to Amasa, art thou in health, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with the right hand to kiss him.

But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand, Joab's left hand. So he smote him therewith in the fifth rib, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him.

Not again. And he died. As most of you will know, ten weeks ago I had an operation for lung cancer and had the upper lobe removed of my right lung.

[1 : 32] On Thursday I went back to the hospital for a check, and thankfully I was told there was no sign of cancer remaining.

But as always, I asked to see the x-ray, and as I do all the tests, and said to the radiologist, which rib was it that the surgeon removed a part of?

And she showed me, counted down the ribs, one, two, three, four, five, and said it was the fifth rib. And immediately this scripture came to my mind, and remained upon my mind to bring before you this morning.

We find, of course, in an earlier chapter, that Abner killed Asahel, the brother of Joab, with the hind end of the spear under the fifth rib.

And in the following chapter, Joab, in revenge, killed Abner with the sword under the fifth rib. As the Lord enables, I would firstly say briefly a few things concerning the setting of this question.

[2 : 57] Then concerning how thankful we should be for bodily and mental health in ourselves, in our loved ones.

How easily we take it for granted. But more importantly, I want us enabled to consider this question.

Art thou in spiritual health, my brother? How far, far more important is it for us children, men and women, to be in spiritual health than to be in bodily or mental health?

Concerning the context, you find in the 19th chapter, how when Joab, in disobedience to David, had killed Absalom, then David sent a message to Amasa.

Joab and Amasa, by the way, were both nephews of David. Zerach, the mother of Joab, Abishai and Asahel, was a sister of David.

[4 : 21] And Amasa's mother was also another sister. Say ye to Amasa, Art thou not of my bone and of my flesh? God do so to me.

And more also, if thou be not captain of the host of the army, before me continually in the room or place of Joab.

And so Joab, in jealousy, had killed Amasa. Using the stratagem that we find in the book of Judges, for as in those days, as now, most people are right-handed.

The origin of saluting or shaking hands with the right hand is to show there is no weapon in the right hand. And Joab had the sword in his left hand, took Amasa by the beard with the right hand, and Amasa treacherously was killed.

Let us just touch upon the need to be thankful for bodily and mental health.

[5 : 39] Like so many providential blessings, we do not appreciate them until they are taken from us. But when we do come into afflictions, what need there is to pray to be kept from a rebellious spirit.

Samuel said to King Saul, Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry.

I'm sure you dear younger ones have often heard older friends pray that a trial should be sanctified to a person.

And perhaps wondered what it meant. The vessels of Solomon's temple were sanctified. They were made holy.

They were to be of use in the worship of God. And when we pray for trials to be sanctified, we pray that the person in the trial and others, of course, affected will find the trial is a blessing.

[7 : 11] And though the body or mind may be afflicted, does it really matter if the soul is prospered?

If in the trial we have the Lord's presence, as I remind you of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, would they not willingly have gone through that fire again if they could have had the presence of the Son of God with them?

I'm sure they would. And so when trials in our families come upon us, may we pray that the trial shall be made a blessing.

When I had bowel cancer nearly 12 years ago, as I was being wheeled to the operating theatre, Psalm 23, which I'd learnt by heart at the day school, as we used to have to learn scriptures there, were so sweet to me.

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Why, David? For thou art with me.

[8 : 41] Now, that makes all the difference. But of course we have to remember that God is sovereign in the trials that come upon his people.

We cannot dwell upon trials just now. Some the Lord permits Satan to bring, as it was with Jonah.

Some the Lord sends, as God sent a great wind into the sea upon the disobedient prophet Jonah. But whatever means or why the trial has come, nothing comes by chance.

And God is sovereign. You lost a deacon, now a time ago, younger than my oldest son.

And yet the Lord has seen fit to spare my life. He is sovereign. We could say, our friend is far better off than I am.

[9 : 57] But the Lord's will be not. Well now let us come more importantly to the question, and you ask yourself this question, I ask myself, am I in spiritual health?

Well let us begin where God begins. Have we been born again? Is there life?

Because if there is no life, there certainly can be no health. someone once asked George Whitefield, the great preacher of the 18th century, why do you so often preach from that text, ye must be born again?

And he said it is because ye must be born again. many things are desirable. Certain things are essential.

And you and I must be born again of the Spirit. Or we cannot see the Kingdom of God that is the Gospel in our personal knowledge and experience of it.

[11 : 30] none of us naturally can remember our birth. Our mothers may have told us where we were born and when, but we cannot remember it.

But the fact that we are alive now proves that we were born. and consider it in this parable as it were.

Before the days of ultrasonic scans and things that doctors have these days, how was it known the newborn babe was alive?

By its feeble cry. But how is a cry made? How do you hear my voice? You hear my voice because air is being expelled from the lungs over the vocal cords.

But that air must first have been breathed in or it could not have been breathed out. And so it is with the newborn son.

[12 : 48] The Holy Spirit breathes life into the son. We read in Genesis God took dust of the earth and breathed into it and Adam became a living son.

And if you and I have that breath of spiritual life breathed into our souls then like the newborn babe we shall cry in distress.

It must be a traumatic experience for the babe to be born as well as for the mother to give birth. And so the babe cries.

and you and I if born again will cry over the weight and stress of indwelling sin.

In Leviticus 13 we have the symptoms of sin set forth as it were by parable.

[14 : 10] The poet puts it like this to see sin smarts but slightly to own with lip confession tis easier still but out of evil cuts deep beyond expression.

In the scripture leprosy is often used as a type of sin. In those days it was incurable and spiritually of course it is incurable now except as we may see through the blood of Christ.

Bring your view of sin to these symptoms. If the plague inside be deeper than the skin of his flesh it is a plague of leprosy.

one of my dear grandchildren was helping me move something not long ago and I drew attention as we washed our hands that I had knocked some skin off and I quoted this to him I didn't feel any pain at the time because it was only skin day the solemn thing of sin is only skin day doesn't cause you any pain then we read if these priests behold the scab spreadeth in the skin then the priest shall pronounce him unclean it is a leprosy do you have to say with the poet sin is mixed with all

I do if you said to the so called man in the street when did you last sin you might get a reply such as well was it last week or week before I took something from the shop and didn't pay for it or was it six months ago when I did this that or the other but if the Holy Spirit has quickened your soul into life you will know there are scarcely a minute of your waking hours when sin is not present in thought or word it spreadeth much abroad and then another symptom was if raw flesh appears it is a plague of leprosy when we have raw flesh we say don't touch me there is raw flesh it's painful to the touch when you think back upon your life and the older we get the more we weep over past sins we know they're forgiven but we still weep over them it's like touching raw flesh painful memory as it are and then another symptom especially for those of us that are older we may foolishly think we've outgrown this or that sin of our years and it breaks out in our thought it is an old leprosy that has still remained perhaps unsuspectingly in our hearts do we know do we win over this plague of leprousness

[18:14] Christ said in those words that we read I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance they that are whole have no need of repentance the righteous referred to there of course are the self-righteous what a mercy that he gathered publicans and sinners with him though the Pharisees scorned him for so doing then to consider another aspect when a child is ill it will refuse even its favourite food it has no appetite because it is ill but perhaps the doctor may come to the door and say to the mother before he sees the child how is he this morning and she says he's had a good breakfast the doctor can say before he sees the child he's on the mend it will soon be well blessed are they that hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled do you hunger and thirst for righteousness the righteousness of Christ Jesus is his word to you more than your necessary food are you willing and we have this experience at home on weeknights at Oakington of those who come to chapel not having had time to go home and have any tea is your soul hungry for the word of God we read of the feeding of the 5,000 and the 7,000 one of the first texts I ever spoke from now nearly 40 years ago was there is a lad here with a few loaves and small fishes we felt our weakness and dependence then we feel it just as much now but you see the Lord took to the loaves and fishes he blessed he broke he gave to the disciples to give to the molded he could have fed them directly himself but he didn't and so he uses his servants and by that I do not confine myself to ministers deacons parents grandparents brothers sisters he uses others to feed his people he had compassion on them that they should not faint by the way but then consider another matter in the parable of HR we have our children's heights at six month intervals from the time they could stand and now we can compare grandchildren with their father or mother how much have you grown spiritually

since I was here last July if you have grown you'll be smaller in your own estimation said the poet the more thy glory strikes my eye the humbler I shall know it would be false modesty for us to say that we do not know more spiritually of our need of a saviour more of his mercy than we did when we were called by his grace so many years ago we do know more but we feel our ignorance more when I was in the infant class and could add and subtract and multiply and divide

I thought I knew all there was to know about mathematics no need for me to stay at school any longer when I'd studied it for another twenty years I then did know more but I felt my ignorance more because I knew there was far far more that I didn't know than previously and so it is with your sinnership and the mercies of God the truths of the scripture you will know more as you grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ but you will feel your ignorance more than you dare how does a child grow naturally the extra flesh the bones the sinning where do they come from they don't come out of the air they come from the food that has been digested it becomes part of them part of them and of course also supplies them with energy and it is only as spiritually you and I feed upon

Jesus Christ that we grow in grace and in the knowledge of him John in the sixth chapter writes of the Lord's words to his disciples Moses gave you not that bread in the wilderness no spiritual food under the law the law serves its purpose a school master to bring us unto Christ and by the spirit's teaching to convict us of our sins under the law but we grow in feeding upon Christ Christ said I am that bread of life I am the living bread which came down from heaven if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever and the bread that I will give is my flesh which

I will give for the life of the world his people in all nations and he said and how solemn this is to you except ye eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood this is spiritually though it is set forth in the ordinance of the Lord's supper except ye eat his flesh and drink his blood ye have no life in you he that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him you can't get a closer union than that can you I in them he in me the bread of life

[27 : 12] I have sometimes at the ordinance dwelt upon this figure the Lord in infinite wisdom chose bread as the symbol of himself we cannot eat the grain as it comes from the harvest field even if it were pure it would do our bodies no good at all that grain has to be crushed in the mill the resulting flour has to be heated in the fire and thus becomes bread sometimes referred to as the staff of life Christ came into this world and set a pure and perfect example of how we ought to live but that never saved one soul his holy soul had to be crushed under the weight of the law that his people had broken and his holy soul heeded in the fire that their sins deserved throughout eternity and thus he became the living great do you and I

I say hunger and thirst all righteousness I think of that dear woman who came to the Lord despite so much discouragement she had the trial of her afflicted daughter he answered her not away then the second trial the disciples said send her away for she cries after us then the third trial the Lord said I'm not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel and she was a woman of kind and he was of course referring to spiritual Israel and then he said it is not me to take the children's bread and cast it unto dogs truth truth Lord yet dogs may eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table not anybody's table their master's table and if you feel yourself but a dog and dogs of course in the east were not pampered pets but scavengers considered vile if you get those crumbs you must be close to his feet and that's where you get the crumbs

I know we often feel like the three score and ten kings in the first chapter of judges who had their thumbs cut off and their great toes cut off you can't grasp very well without a thumb you can't walk very well without a great toe but we read they gathered their meat under the king's table they didn't starve oh that you and I may have more of these crumbs and of course we cannot dwell upon it but wherever the Lord took bread he always broke he never cut it with a knife when bread is broken every piece is different in shape and size from every other piece and so his people feed upon him with the portion that is needful for their sin for their sin but to return to the many diseases that may come upon us and over which we grieve over these things where shall we find that healing we read of it in the 53rd chapter of

Isaiah always notice the tense that is used in scripture past tense present tense future tense he was nearly 2000 years ago he was wounded for our transgressions he was bruised for our iniquities the chastisement of our peace was upon him with his stripes we are in 2008 healed he was oppressed he was afflicted yet he opened not his mouth he is in the preaching of the gospel to the end of time he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb so he opened not his mouth and then that verse which seems to be uncomprehensible it pleased the

Lord to bruise him he hath put him to grave it pleased the father that Christ should suffer for us we who are parents or grandparents would give our lives to save our child's life would you give your child's life to save an enemy's life no you say you can't expect us to do that while we were yet sinners as writes Paul to the Romans, Christ died for us.

[33 : 55] God so loved that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Art thou in health, my blood? Have you known that healing power of the stripes of the Lord is blood?

Top Lady speaks of it in the Rock of Ages. Let the water and the blood from the riven side which flow be of sin the double cure cleansed me from its guilt and power.

Its guilt and power. Just one more type or parable comes to the mind.

We do not expect a newborn babe to walk but if the child was two or three or four years old and wasn't walking how concerned we should be.

[35 : 17] is it getting the wrong food? Is a wrong example being set before it? Do you and I walk in his commandments?

walking uprightly before our fellow man walking like Joe in the fear of the Lord?

Do we have that desire through love to walk in his ordinances? If we are in spiritual health then these things should follow in practice in our lives.

art thou in health my brother? Well I leave these remarks now they told me at the hospital I shouldn't preach for more than 20 minutes but we have to do as the Lord we feel leads us.

Oh may you and I have this concern for spiritual health in these and so many other things that the Lord may enable you to meditate upon may you forgive anything of this Amen