

I have just come through a bout of intestinal sickness. It is nowhere near the magnitude of those who are fighting aggressive cancer or have lost 10 members of their family to Covid-19, but it laid me pretty low for a week. In my case we think it happened because of spoiled food. (The Florida heat spoils things so much more quickly than we experienced in the north) and it took that long to get all those poisons out of my system and allow my body to regain its health and strength.

But my sick, weak body brought into focus the much larger issue of Divine Healing. As the pandemic continues to dominate the global landscape, God's help and hope in sickness is the critical issue I want to address this week.

## **Jehovah Rapha**

Sickness was not part of God's original creation. In Eden all was healthy and whole. But human sin and rebellion against God destroyed that ideal state and began its wrecking course through human history. Still, it is interesting that in God's deliverance of Israel from their slavery in Egypt, *"the LORD set before them the following decree as a standard to test their faithfulness to him. <sup>26</sup> He said, "If you will listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his sight, obeying his commands and keeping all his decrees, then I will not make you suffer any of the diseases I sent on the Egyptians; for I am the LORD who heals you."<sup>27</sup> After leaving Marah, the Israelites traveled on to the oasis of Elim, where they found twelve springs and seventy palm trees. They camped there beside the water.*

*Jehovah Rapha: I am the Lord who heals you.* God provided for these thousands of Israeli former slaves water at the oasis at Elim; he provided manna as their staple in the wilderness. It was called "the bread of heaven" (Ps; 78:24-25) with exactly enough for their needs each day for 40 years. He gave them water from the rock and quails who landed in their campsite each night

These physical foods were a symbol of the spiritual food God also freely provided to keep his people healthy. *Isa. 55:1-3: "Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink— even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine or milk— it's all free! <sup>2</sup> Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength? Why pay for food that does you no good? Listen to me, and you will eat what is good. You will enjoy the finest food.<sup>3</sup> "Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen, and you will find life. I will make an everlasting covenant with you. I will give you all the unfailing love I promised to David."* People's physical and spiritual healing was all an expression of His unfailing love.

## **"Come to Me" Jesus said.**

In the same way, Jesus called people to Himself for health and wholeness; *Yes, I am the bread of life!<sup>49</sup> Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. <sup>50</sup> Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh."* And he demonstrated that truth on the physical level by healing people's diseases and delivering them from all the destructive results of evil in their lives. He invited them to: *Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."*

Jesus Christ gave Himself to all humanity to be our Life and Healer, our Light and Resurrection and Hope. He remains Jehovah Rapha: The Lord our healer.

## **The role of believers in our healing**

And He has given believers access into the throne room of heaven to “*find grace to help in times of need.*” Many times it is the prayers of others on our behalf that brings about the deliverance from sickness we need. That happened for me this week, and I am eternally grateful to what Marti calls my little “army” of prayer warriors who have continually upheld me to God for my health and strength and protection from Covid-19 and all the ills that plague our world. They have prayed believing in all God’s promises and bringing these as the word of their testimony in prayer to defeat Satan’s constant efforts to kill, and steal and destroy all people through his attacks on their bodies, minds and souls.

Therefore, this week instead of fleshing out this sermon with many stories of healing and teaching about suffering in the Bible, I have chosen to just call us all back to the promises of God that are the basis for our faith in Jehovah Rapha and the words of our testimony as we pray for healing for ourselves and others. I just finished Max Lucado’s book *Unshakable Hope*, which our daughter Laurie gave to Keith for Father’s Day. (Max Lucado, *Unshakable Hope, Building our Lives on the Promises of God*, Thomas Nelson, 2018.) His thoughts highlight this emphasis on the power of God’s promises.

## **Help and Hope Through the Promises of God**

“Could you use some abounding hope? Not occasional hope or sporadic hope or thermostatic hope, but abounding hope?” It’s yours for the asking. ‘*Grab the promised hope with both hands and never let go. It’s an unbreakable spiritual lifeline, reaching past all appearances right to the very presence of God where Jesus, running on ahead of us, has taken up his permanent post as high priest for us*’ (Heb. 6:18-20 *the Message*), (pp.161)

“The promises of God work. They can walk you through horrific tragedies. They can buoy you in the day-to-day difficulties. They are, indeed, the great and precious promises of God” (p.163).

“Let’s be what we were made to be- People of the Promise. Keep this declaration handy. Say it out loud. Fill your lungs with air and your heart with hope, and let the devil himself hear you declare your belief in God’s goodness. We are building our lives on the promises of God because his Word is unbreakable, our hope is unshakable. We do not stand on the problems of life or the pain in life. We stand on the great and precious promises of God” (p.14).

“People of the Promise have an advantage. They determine to ponder, proclaim, and pray the promises of God. They are like Abraham who ‘*didn’t tiptoe around God’s promise asking cautiously skeptical questions. He plunged into the promise and came up strong*’ (Rom. 4:20 *the Message*)” (p.10).

“Anyone can give pep talks, but if God is who he claims to be, he sure as shootin’ better have a word for the despondent. Self-help manuals might get you through a bad mood or a tough patch. But what about an abusive childhood or a debilitating accident or years of chronic pain or public ridicule? Does God have a word for the dark nights of the soul? He does. The promise begins with this phrase: ‘*Weeping may last through the night*’ (Ps. 30:5 *NLT*)” (pp. 118). And goes on to say ‘*But joy comes with the morning. Joy comes.*’ (p. 123)

“The devil’s best attempts to discourage us fall victim to God’s resolve to shape us. What Satan intends for evil, Jesus will use for good. Satan’s attempts to destroy us will actually develop our faith. *Jesus says, ‘In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world’* (John 16:33)” (pp.88).

“Your prayers matter to God because you matter to God. You aren’t simply just anybody;...you are his child...When God saved you, he enlisted you. He gave not only forgiveness for your past but also authority in the present and a role in the future” (pp. 52, 53).

“Many believers settle for a two-thirds God. They rely on the Father and the Son, but overlook the Holy Spirit...The Holy Spirit is central to the life of the Christian. Everything that happens from the book of Acts to the end of the book of Revelation is a result of the work of the Holy Spirit of Christ. The Spirit came alongside the disciples, indwelled them, and gave the early church the push they needed to face the challenges ahead” (pp. 130, 131).

“*‘Having disarmed the powers and authorities, [Jesus] made a public spectacle of [the forces of evil], triumphing over them by the cross’* (Col. 2:15). Jesus stripped Satan of certain victory. He and his minions are being held on a short leash until the final judgment. On that day, the great Day, Jesus will cast Satan into a lake of fire from which the devil will never return (2 Peter 2:4; Jude v.6). Evil will have its day and appear to have the sway, but God will have his say and ultimately win the day” (pp. 30).

So, beloved, as we endure debilitating sickness, emotional heaviness and sometimes interminable grief, we go through all this suffering with the Presence of the Holy Spirit our Comforter, the assurance that Jesus has disarmed the evil powers that plague the world, the certain hope that God will see us through, and the powerful prayers of God’s people to hold us up. We go forward as People of the Promise who, like Abraham, can *‘plunge into the promise and come up strong’*(Rom.4). Hallelujah! Amen.

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