

Sickness and Health 4

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Now dear ones, maybe we could just tonight talk a little more about God's life and the body. Maybe before I begin it would be good just to deal with that question, which is: can we really expect healing of residual pains of bodily injuries sustained years ago? Presumably that's the kind of injury you would get in a car accident. You can see that we cannot divide diseases up into structural diseases which would be that kind of thing, and infectious diseases, invasive diseases, and spiritual and emotional diseases -- and then say that God can only heal one category.

God can heal any kind of weakness or sickness. We'll see that in some of the promises that he gives us in his Word. But God will heal any kind of weakness or sickness, anything that really is hindering us from being what he wants us to be in his kingdom's work? God will heal those things as well. God will not only heal infectious or invasive diseases, but will heal sickness or weaknesses that come from that kind of thing.

One of the things that we have to be very sure of is to find out from him whether we were in some way at fault in that situation. I remember a girl who had a car accident, and in some sense it was an attitude of sin or carelessness that had caused the accident. Now it would be important there as with every other sickness to say, "Father, what are you trying to show me in this?" Do you see? Then to confess it and to get it right. But then to trust God for the healing and the wholeness of the sickness. I have known brothers and sisters who have been healed from this kind of thing.

Dear ones, what we've been sharing the past few Sundays on sickness is contained in 1 Corinthians 6:19: "Do you not know that your body," -- your body -- "is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?"

Now why didn't God say, "Do you not know that your spirit is a temple of the Holy Spirit?" Why did he say, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?" The answer is because he reckons that his Holy Spirit who dwells within our spirits will move out and discipline our souls, and bring peace to our minds and balance to our emotions, and liberty to our wills. Then he will move out into our bodies and bring complete redemption and wholeness to our bodies.

That's what we've been saying -- that God's Spirit who dwells within us brings complete wholeness to every part of us and brings wholeness to our bodies. We used the example of Jesus who at the transfiguration found that this resurrection life was bursting through his physical body and not only filled him to completeness so that he was utterly healthy, but actually broke through so that he seemed to be shining and transfigured on that mountain top. Then of course on the resurrection day, his spiritual body broke through completely and just transformed his physical body.

So that's what we've been saying -- that God's Holy Spirit will bring light to our own bodies. Not only to our minds, or to our spirits, or to our emotions, but actually to our bodies. You get that in Romans 8:11. It's really the parts of the Bible -- that are important in what we share. Romans 8:11: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you."

The important word is "mortal." It doesn't say corruptible body as when Paul is talking about the resurrection -- when this corruptible body will be put on incorruptibility -- but it says our mortal

body. That is our present body, our physical body.

If God's Spirit dwells in you, that spirit will give life to your physical body. It will actually fill your physical body with health and wholeness. That's God's promise. Never does God look upon the body as an old physical prison cell that we have to escape from, or that we have to put up with.

But he looks upon our body always as something that is sharing the wholeness of the Holy Spirit. You find that in 1 Timothy 6:12: "Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

Now do you see the words, "Take hold of the eternal life"? There are many of us who dwell in weakness and sickness because we don't take hold of the eternal life which is within us, and realize that that is to be taken by us for physical wholeness and health.

God says, "Take hold of it. Don't just let it dwell within and say, 'Ah yeah, the Holy Spirit takes care of the spiritual side of my life. He takes care of the Christian side, the witnessing side, the prayer side. But this body I have to struggle along with through drugs, and through medicine as well as I can.'" God's word is always, "No, take hold of the life that is inside you."

Loved ones, we need to do that. There is a Holy Spirit within you that is complete wholeness. The Hebrew word for holiness means health. It means health, and the Holy Spirit within you will bring health to your own body.

Now you can see that there are really two laws at work in your body. There's sort of the law of consumption. There's the consuming of energy that goes on inside you continually. Just an eating up and a burning up of energy -- in walking along, in running, in speaking, in exercising, and in thinking. There's just a consumption of energy. Then there is a replenishment -- a law of replenishment whereby life comes into you through rest, and through food, and through sleep. Those two really should be balanced all the time inside your body for perfect health.

Now, in a Christian's life there is an extra consumption taking place over that of a non-Christian. You can see that if you look at it in Galatians 4:19, where Paul mentions that in his own life: "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!" Paul said, "with whom I am again in travail." Now that's just one of the consumption exercises or drains on energy that a Christian has that a non-Christian has not. There is a travailing, and a laboring in prayer that non-Christians know nothing about. There is a fighting against Satan that non-Christians know nothing about. There is a resisting Satan that non-Christians don't have to worry about too much.

In other words, there are a lot of consuming factors in a Christian's life that use up energy that a non-Christian does not have to face. That's why many Christians have no trouble with their health until they begin to really live for Jesus. Many of us have no trouble with weakness or weariness of body until we began really to be a priest unto Jesus. Many of us, until we were filled with the Holy Spirit, never engaged in this kind of warfare and so we never had this kind of strain upon our bodies.

You can see this is why it's vital for those who are Christians to not only depend on food, and rest and sleep to replenish their own energies, but to depend on Jesus himself. Brothers and sisters, you cannot live the strenuous life of a Christian in your body without receiving the life of Jesus for your body. That is why there is a part in the Bible that says, "The Lord is for the body." The Lord Jesus is for your body, and you really need to receive his life for your body. You need to

receive him into your body to fill you with himself. That's why Jesus says so often that he is the vine and you are the branches. It's vital for us to receive the life that runs through the main plant of the vine into the branches. If you're not living that way -- you'll go down.

There's a part of the Bible that explains it well, saying that Christians need not only food and rest but something deeper than that. It's one of Jesus' replies to Satan in the wilderness. It's Matthew 4:4: "But he answered, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."'"

God's own word through the Holy Spirit is life to a Christian, and it's life to your body. Yet the other side that it says is, "Man shall not live by bread alone." So we need to take care of our bodies. We need to eat right, and we need to sleep right, and we need to exercise right. But do you see? After you've done all -- you'll crash in a physical or nervous breakdown unless you've learned to eat of Jesus' body itself. Unless you've learned to take him into yourself as health, and wholeness, and energy -- you'll wear out.

A.B. Simpson puts it like this: "Then the body broke away in every sort of way. I had always worked hard and from the age of 14 I studied and labored and spared no strength. I took charge of a large congregation at the age of 21. I broke down utterly half a dozen times and at last my constitution was worn out. Many times I feared I should drop dead in my pulpit. I could not ascend any height without a sense of suffocation because of a broken-down heart and exhausted nervous system."

"I heard of the Lord's healing but I struggled against it. I was afraid of it. I had been taught in theological seminaries that the age of the supernatural was past and I could not go back from my early training. My head was in my way. But at last when I was brought to attend the 'funeral of my dogmatics' the Lord whispered to me the little secret, 'Christ in you.' And from that hour I received him for my body as I had done for my soul. I was made so strong and well that work has been a perfect delight. For years I have spent my summer holiday in the hot city of New York preaching and working among the masses as I never did before; besides the work of our Home and College and an immense mass of library work and much besides. But the Lord did not merely remove my sufferings. It was more than simple healing. He so gave me Himself that I lost the painful consciousness of physical organs."

"That is the best of the health he gives. I thank the Lord that he keeps me from all morbid physical consciousness and a body that is the object of anxious care, and gives a simple life that is a delight and a service for the Master, that is a rest and joy."

Really it's true. It really is true. I had some weaknesses in my own body that I cosseted, and looked after, and took care of, and tried to treat with exercise, and with the right rest, and Jesus came in and worked a miracle. As long as I trusted and as long as I eat his flesh and drink his blood into myself, so long the health stays.

Loved ones, it is a miracle and it is God's will, not only that he will heal our sicknesses but that he will keep us well and keep us healthy. That happens as long as we take the Lord God himself for our bodies. The Lord is for the body. The Lord is not just for the spirit. He is not just for the soul. The Lord Jesus is for your body. You can actually receive Jesus for your bodily health and wholeness.

This goes right through the Old Testament. Just as you look through it you find all the time that

God preserved his own servants and his saints in health and wholeness. You find that even in the case of Paul, as you'll see a little later, even where the sickness still remained as far as the outward phenomena was concerned. Yet there was health and wholeness that enabled these men to do God's work without any holding back.

You find that promise -- God's own will -- in Deuteronomy 33:25. You do need a promise, a clear promise in his word in order to go before him in this regard. Deuteronomy 33:25: "Your bars shall be iron and bronze; and as your days, so shall your strength be."

"And as your days, so shall your strength be." That means as long as you're alive your strength will be there available to you. So really it's up to us to get up each morning, whatever the night before has been like, however restless we have been in sleep. It is good to get up each morning and say, "Father, you've said, 'As my days are, so shall my strength be.' Now this is another day you've given me. Now I trust you to make that promise real, and I take your life now. I take your life now into me for this day."

And brothers and sisters, it means a disregarding of the feelings in the body, or the feelings in the emotions. It means a walk by faith -- not by sight. But as you receive that, so God gives you strength. As your days are, so will your strength be.

In other words, it is God's will for his children to be robust and healthy as long as they're alive and really, in a way, to die well. To die well! Even if we die like Paul with a thorn in the flesh, to die well. To die indifferent to whatever physical ailment there seems to be, and in no way held back by that physical ailment.

That's what you find right through scripture. Look at Abraham in Romans 4:19. These verses refer to him: "He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."

Abraham was nearly 100 years of age, and, "He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead." The body still remained as good as dead. Do you see that? The body didn't suddenly blossom with a young man's body. The body was still as good as dead. But God gave Abraham the kind of strength and life that enabled him to have a son, and gave Sarah's body the same kind of life that enabled her to bear a son.

See -- the body remained as good as dead. The body remained old. It's just that the life of Jesus is different from physical life. Do you see that? You could have all of the signs of cancer with Jesus' life and still continue a full ministry. I knew a man, Brian Hessian, a minister in England who was dying of cancer. He never was healed of cancer -- at least the world would have said he never was healed. He had countless operations after operations and everybody would say, "Ah, he wasn't believing." The man had hardly anything inside him left. They had cut away organs upon organs and he continued a full ministry right to the moment he went into the Father's arms.

He actually traveled around the country. I met him in Ireland. He traveled around the country and he traveled into Europe. They were cutting away all the time, more operations upon operations. But the life of Jesus is separate from the phenomena in the physical body.

It's separate from those symptoms -- so that a man can work and can walk with a body that the world would say cannot hold up any kind of ministry. That kind of man can walk in strength. So it is not the symptoms. Now again, I remind you that it is not just that God does that. He does that to some people. With most people he makes them whole and well. But even when he lets the symptoms continue he gives a life that is different from physical life, and that manages to enable you to continue a full ministry and a full work.

You see it again with Moses in Deuteronomy 34:7: "Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." Now that's at 120 years old. That's God's will. God can keep us as long as it's his will for us to continue in this world. He can keep us well. He can keep us like that. "His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated."

It's the same with Caleb. You can read it in Joshua 14:9-11. Caleb, one of the scouts that was sent into the Promised Land, is speaking in Joshua 14:9-11: "And Moses swore on that day, saying, 'Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance for you and your children for ever, because you have wholly followed the Lord my God.' And now, behold, the Lord has kept me alive, as he said, these forty-five years since the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, while Israel walked in the wilderness; and now, lo, I am this day eighty-five years old. I am still as strong to this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war, and for going and coming.'" That is God's word to us.

If God wants you to live to 85, he will give you the health and the strength to live until that time. As your days are, so will your strength be. So it goes on. I could give you lots of references about David and about Joshua himself, about Job, about Ehud, and about other saints of God -- that God did give them strength and that the Lord was for the body. And you know that that was in those days -- then how much more now in the days of the Holy Spirit, when grace is flowing like a river and it is plentiful for all of us.

Now do you see -- the one condition is that it is for God's work. You find that it is for God's work. You remember that promise about the diseases that God had put upon the Egyptians. He said, "None of those diseases will I put upon you if you abide in my statutes." {Paraphrase of Exodus 15:26}

Now, brothers and sisters, it does mean that you have to live a life that is only for Jesus. I tell you this, as soon as your eyes turn in on yourselves and you begin to live for yourself and for your own pleasure, the strength of God is no longer available. You'll find that, and I've found it in my own life -- when you're going out after God's work and God's will -- it doesn't matter what the difficulties are. He gives more healing and strength.

When you're engaged in his work there is no shortage of supply. My wife and I joke about it a little because if I'm going off to Pittsburgh, or down to Puerto Rico, or somewhere for a week's meetings, and I'm just feeling tired and weary, we both know that I'll come back blasting away like mad when I come back from the place -- because it seems that when you're engaged in his work, or giving out the life that Jesus has given you, it seems that that life flowing through you is like good clear blood through your arteries. It makes them whole and well. Do you see it is tied to the work of his kingdom, dear ones? It cannot be otherwise.

You find that in Romans 12. It's the one condition that we mentioned at the very beginning of the series on health and on sickness. It's an essential condition if God is going to give you this

healing life. Romans 12:1: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." In other words, you do need to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

For many of us it ties up with what I was sharing at the beginning about marriage. It means giving your whole body over to the Father: "You do with it what you want, Father. Use it or don't use it. Whatever you want to do with it -- I give it to you."

But it does require us to make that full sacrifice. You need to offer the body to God. If you keep it for yourself you'll grow weary and weak. It is so every time. That's why I'm anxious for you to keep going out for Jesus. That's why I'm anxious for us to get out into the world to the 2.5 billion that do not know Jesus. {This message was presented in about 1975.}

Loved ones, you'll be a bunch of weak, sick people unless you live for the world for whom Jesus has died. Really. And you'll be all the time wrought up in hospitalization. You'll be all the time wrought up with looking after yourself -- unless you really go out and live for the world that Jesus has died for. Then if you live for that, he will take care of you. He will hold you up. So he gives you the strength while you're living for him. Turn in on yourself and you grow weary and sick, and you begin to worry about your health.

Now it's so, right through even with old Paul. I think it's important to look at Paul -- because a lot of us say, "Well, what about Paul? What about the thorn in the flesh?" So, let's look briefly at 2 Corinthians 12:7-9. You can see that Paul is speaking here: "And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

You remember, we said last Sunday that from time-to-time God gives some of his giants a sickness that they have to bear. But that sickness they are able to glory in, because of the paradox described there in Verse 9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Now the weakness remained. Old Paul still had an old weak frail body, whatever was wrong with it, and it obviously was a physical sickness. If you look up some of the other references, you get some idea of Paul's sickness. So Paul was still weak and frail, but Jesus' power was made real in the midst of that weaknesses. Do you see that's very tricky?

The weakness was still there but Jesus' life surged through and achieved more than ten men could achieve -- because Paul was constantly in shipwrecks, being stoned, being persecuted, being imprisoned, and taking journeys in days where any kind of journey was misery. So it was Jesus' life that was coming through and achieving that.

Now it's very important I think that we see that you walk that by faith and not by sight. In other words, you don't look at your body and say, "Well, you've made it whole -- so now I can go." No -- you step out as the body is sick and weak. You step out and say, "Lord, this weak old sick body will never achieve this. But I trust you to make your power real in me while my weakness is there."

The two go together, loved ones. And do you see that's the way healing comes? Healing doesn't come from saying, "Lord, I'll go when you heal this body. I'll go when you remove this weakness."

Healing comes when you say, "Lord Jesus, you've told me to go this way. The body looks weak to me. But I know I'm going to do it by your strength anyway. So I go out."

Then God either removes your weakness, or he provides his own strength in the midst of that weakness. Some of us have to learn that. Some of us especially who have very healthy bodies have to learn that -- because we are so proud of our health and our strength that we want to kind of combine it with God's own strength. But God will share the glory with no one. So, often he has to bring our ordinary natural strength in our bodies to the end of itself.

Do you see our bodies are governed by our minds and emotions? But we cannot do anything for God's work with the strength of our minds and emotions. That's a natural strength, and it will always claim glory for itself. A strong body will always draw attention to itself. So God has to bring even those of us who have strong bodies to the end of ourselves. He has to bring us into things that are beyond ourselves.

I don't encourage you to go out into foolish pursuits -- because God will only give you strength for what is his will. But I do point out to you that God is going to continually ask you to go beyond your own strength, and every time you hold back you will miss the life of Jesus in you.

And brothers and sisters I'll present it to you again: 2.5 billion people who don't know Jesus. 800 million in China, 500 million in India, 200 million in South America, and so it goes on. Don't you see that we will have to be supermen and superwomen? Don't you see that we will have to have a supernatural strength? And what I am saying is: that is the glory of it. You go out after Jesus and he supplies this strength to you by faith but not by sight.

And of course it ties up with what we said about healing. If every time you have sickness you become preoccupied with the symptoms and the phenomena and you go to God and say, "Lord, look at this. Look at this weakness in my arm. Look at the way my mind can't concentrate." Then as you concentrate on those phenomena, on the things that are seen -- so the things that are unseen will become more and more distant and God can do nothing with you.

That's why, brothers and sisters, in a body of Christ it is never the case that people talk about their sicknesses or their weaknesses. It's not that they don't see them. They're realistic. They don't go the Christian Science route and say they're not there. They say they're there, but they don't talk about them. They talk about the life of Jesus that they know anyway is the only thing that empowers them to do God's work.

Now it's important to get back to the old condition, and it's the same condition as we've mentioned before. You have it in 2 Corinthians 4:10-11, the method or the condition under which God will give us this strength and this life. 2 Corinthians 4:10-11. It's good to see some of the things that Paul suffered too in Verse 9: "Persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies."

So if the life of Jesus is to be manifested in our bodies, we have to be always carrying in the body the death of Jesus. And then repeated in Verse 11 again: "For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh." And do you see that that's the condition?

In order for the life of Jesus to be manifested in our bodies, in order for the life of Jesus to be manifested in our mortal flesh -- we must always be carrying in the body the death of Jesus. We must always be given up to death for Jesus' sake.

And what was the death of Jesus? The dying of Jesus was all the time saying "No" to himself. All the time saying "No" to his own pleasure. All the time saying "No" to his own convenience. All the time saying "No" to his own comfort. All the time saying "No" to his own future. The dying of Jesus was the death to the self-life. It was the taking of self off the throne, off the control point of the life, and putting God in charge and saying, "Lord God, I live for you and you alone."

In order to have the life of Jesus manifested in our bodies, we need to be in that position, loved ones, all the time living for Jesus, for the world, for God -- never for ourselves. And loved ones, honestly the world would see the healthiest group of people that it had ever seen -- if all of us tonight really committed ourselves to that kind of life. I challenge you on it: do you want the other miserable "chocolate soldier" kind of life, where you look after yourself with the insurance, and the right kind of house, and the right kind of children, and the right kind of job, and the right kind of connections?

Loved ones, is it to be that kind of life, or is it to be a life that is always dying to itself and always going out beyond itself? If it is that, then God will make the life of Jesus real inside you and continually bring you health and wholeness. It's God's promise in the Bible that says that God will supply it to us.

There's another important thing, and I think we should look at it. It shows a principle that I think we need to see clearly, in Jeremiah 45:5: "'And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not; for behold, I am bringing evil upon all flesh, says the Lord; but I will give you your life as a prize of war in all places to which you may go.'"

"But I will give you your life as a prize of war in all places to which you may go." God promises that he'll give us this life as a prize of war in all places to which you may go. But he gives you it in the place. You don't stand here and say, "Lord, I feel that I can't, on the advice of the medics, go to a climate such as you get in Africa, because I'm obviously not fit to face it." God said he would give you his life in all places to which you shall go.

Not before you leave to go to the place, but in the place itself. That's why you can never receive life today for tomorrow. You can't gather manna for today and keep it for tomorrow -- it will spoil. In other words, the health of Jesus, and the life of Jesus for your body will come moment-by-moment. Loved ones, it's a moment-by-moment receiving -- so that you're always leaning heavily on Jesus. You're never in a position where you say, "Oh yeah, I could tackle it. I have enough strength and health stored up for it." If you look forward to the thing you'll never be able to do it. You'll never have the strength enough to say, "Yes, I have strength enough for next week."

It's always God will to give you his life as a prize of war in all places to which you shall go. So it's in the midst of the situation itself that God will give you the strength. And all I have found is that every time I've crumpled back as a weakling and said, "No, no, I haven't the strength for it," God has said, "Yes, that's right -- you haven't the strength. I know you haven't the strength. And if you depend on your own strength you'll never have the strength. But I will give you the strength at the time that you'll need it."

So it is a beautiful life. It's a life that is really free from anxiety for health for tomorrow. It's a life that is free from worrying about, "I wonder -- will I have enough strength for tomorrow?" It's a life that is really free when you have a bad night -- a sleepless night, and all the thoughts of Satan crowd in upon you and you hear said to you, "This is bound to be a miserable day, because you've had no rest tonight. So let's just suffer it out. You'll be tense. You'll be taut. You'll just be worn out all day. Let's see it through best we can, and get through as soon as we can to bed." But God will give you strength for that day.

So you get up in the morning and you say, "Yeah, I didn't get a good night's sleep. But I take the life of Jesus for my life today. Lord Jesus, I take your life for this physical body today."

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