

## Faith Over Fear

**God's Promises Trump Human Crises**

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**Given 21-Mar-20; Sermon #1534**

Please turn in your Bibles to Isaiah the 40th chapter. I know I do not do this a lot. I normally ramble on for twenty minutes or so with an introduction. And actually, I am going to ramble on for twenty minutes or so in an introduction, but I am going to start it with a scripture and so it will not seem quite so much like a rambling introduction on my part. But I thought I would start here because this is the place we should start in something like this, when we talk about what is going on in the world.

**Isaiah 40:27-31** Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God"? [This is God's response.] Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

I decided to start here in my sermon because this understanding of God, this perspective of the One we worship, stands at the foundation of my comments today. The sermon begins with the state of the world today. This passage begins with how the world thinks.

There is a feeling out there, whether expressed or not, that God is unaware of what is happening, that His lack of direct intervention is proof that He does not care, or even, with many these days, that He does not exist at all. The deistic idea that God may have created the world but has essentially left it to

its own devices is alive and well in Christendom today. Everybody seems to live their lives without much care about God and not much expectation of His intervention or even interest in their lives.

Sure, we see and hear a great deal about praying for one another. It is all over Facebook. Please pray for people who are going through the coronavirus and etcetera. We hear a great deal of that. We hear of people saying, Pray for this nation. Pray for those in Italy. Pray for those in China. Pray for those wherever this coronavirus has struck. Pray for the pandemic to pass quickly. And, of course, last Sunday, President Trump called for a national day of prayer. So the idea is out there to pray to God.

But my take on it, and maybe I am just old cynic, is that such reactions tend to be more reflex than faithful and hopeful. I do not see a lot of expectation in their calling for prayers what Christians should do. Right? That is one of the main things Christians do. They pray in time of crisis. It is expected that Christians will pray, but I do not get a sense from these people that prayer is an actual tool that works. Personally, I think it works. I know it works. I have seen proof that it works. But we have this normal idea, or at least it seems normal to me, that either God does not care or that God has gone off someplace, or that God is just letting us go and do whatever we do. So we have what the Israelites said in verse 27, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God."

I think modern Israel is a lot like ancient Israel in this regard, and you know how I think I can prove it? One five letter word, starts with a "p." Panic. Fear. Panic, whether it is hoarding toilet paper or whatever it is that they are doing out there, is a sign that people do not expect God to be of any help. Now, there are things that we do in order to be prudent, we need to stock up on things that could last us and tide us over. That is a normal, right thing to do.

But buying out every last piece of toilet paper in an aisle? Why? This is not even a disease that has problems with that area of the body! Are you expecting to be holed up for, I do not know, two years? Somebody did the math over there and they found that you would have to go to the bathroom like 184 times a day or something to use up all the Costco toilet paper that you just bought over the next couple months.

But notice how God responds to this idea or this saying by the Israelites that God was not hearing them and that He was not watching what they were doing. His response, to put it in a word, is astonishment. "What?! How can you say that? How can you say that I don't care that, I have not heard, that I'm ignoring you?" He says, "Don't you know anything? Haven't you learned anything in your lives? Aren't you aware," He says, "that I am the God who made everything—you included? I never sleep." He says, "I never need rest. I know everything going on to the smallest detail." He knows where every atom, every molecule is at any time in His great creation. He says, "I'm constantly supplying the needy and the weak with what they need." He says here, "Those who wait on the Lord, if you'll just be patient, if you'll just exercise a little bit of faith, I will come through for you in ways that you thought were impossible."

A little bit of trust, little bit of patience, little bit of endurance. That is all you need. Take it to the bank. He is on His throne. He is working. Theologian A. W. Tozer caught the essence of this in a quote I saw last night that was posted by Verna Simpkins. Thank you, Verna. "While it looks like things are out of control, behind the scenes there is a God who hasn't surrendered His authority." Not one bit.

That is exactly where we must begin when we consider something like this coronavirus or the quarantine rules or the social distancing. (I am happy to see that most of you guys are not doing it. Well some of you are doing it. Look at Beth's example here. She is all by herself in the front row. She works for the Mecklenburg County Public Health Department so she is complying. \*laughter)

When we consider something like this—all the social distancing, the sheltering in place, the thousands of victims, the sheer upside down nature of our lives over the past couple weeks—we must begin with God. We must put Him first. What is the one great constant of everything, everyone, all time? God. God is faithful. God is gracious. God is powerful. God comes through. But we are in unknown territory and we tend to fear the unknown. We may have read about epidemics and pandemics in history, but we have never personally experienced one this broad, this pervasive. One that has so much impacted our lives that we are huddling in our homes.

If nothing else, it is unsettling even for those who otherwise pooh-pooh these type of things. We can hardly believe that it is happening. How did this happen in such a short time—that we went from freely doing whatever we do in our daily lives to having them shut down so completely? People cannot believe that their lives have changed so profoundly, so quickly. And for some, this great change is plain terrifying. They are afraid of everything. Fear gnaws at them because they feel powerless. They feel alone. They do not have answers. And frankly, they do not have any hope.

The national media is saying that the world population is going to be cut in half here in the next couple weeks. They are not saying that, but that is just the impression. "If you don't do your social distancing, if you don't shelter in place, if you don't do this, that, and the other thing, this thing is going to sweep through the nation. We aren't going to have enough beds. We're not going to have enough ventilators, and everything is just going to go to the proverbial hell in a handbasket." We do not necessarily have backing for all of that. We have their word.

So watching the news, people get scared because they do not know what to believe. And this may include some of you because you may be in one of those high risk groups, whether it happens to be because of age or because having one, two, or three underlying conditions that this virus tends to exploit.

So because of the unknowns that are out there, some of which may actually be *unknowable*, we just do not know yet, and because of the confusing swirl of information, rumor, instructions, recommendations, and got to be frank here, blatantly false information that is being funneled through various channels, people are fearful. And we may be fearful, even though we know as Christians that we ought to be *faithful*. We are human, we still fear. So that is my topic for today—faith over fear. But I am talking about the disturbing clash of fear and faith during stressful times like these, and we will actually get to that part of it toward the end of the sermon. There will be a few other things that I go to before that.

(I will return to my Doctrine of Israel sermons at another time when it is more appropriate. I think addressing, at least for this week, the current

situation is more necessary right now than the ins and outs of Israel and New Testament theology. I think that could wait a few weeks.)

I also do not want to get into things like end time prophecy, conspiracy theories, or any speculation about this disease being some kind of false flag operation or a trial run for taking over our nation by the, I do not know, the 300 or the other elites that are out there. I am not going there. Pestilence and death is part of the fourth seal. It is the pale horse of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, but Jesus calls the seals "the beginning of sorrows" in Matthew 24:8.

In my view, the first four seals have been open since the first century, for have we not seen deception, religious deception, and war and famine and diseases ever since Jesus Christ when He made that prophecy in Matthew 24 and then gave it to John again in Revelation, the sixth chapter? But these things will intensify as we get nearer to Christ's return. But in terms of this disease, I think (my own opinion here), that this contagion needs to get a whole lot *worse* before we can consider it a pivotal and definitive sign of the end. That may come as a shock, but the swine flu that we had eleven or twelve years ago, was far worse than what we have seen with this coronavirus. And we did not bat an eye at it back in 2009, I think it was.

I know that this coronavirus is a disease that is easy to get. But it has yet to reach even the swine flu level, which was something that eleven years ago we heard about it on the news, but it was not frightening everybody. So I think in terms of this being any kind of indication of where we are in prophecy, it is a little bit early for that. We will see. I could be wrong. I freely admit that I am not a prophecy guy. I do not think that my opinions or my prognostications are anything to write home about or latch on to. That is not my bag, as it were. But that is just my opinion—that this is not one of those big signs of the end.

Instead, I hope that my approach to this topic today will both enlighten and encourage us as we face perhaps another six weeks of sheltering in place or being in lock down and social distancing and all of that. I would rather you be encouraged and be ready to face these weeks of isolation, if that is the case with you, with good cheer and confidence in God. And six weeks, which brings us into early May, appears to be the soonest that we can expect

the present restrictions to be lifted and life returned to normal. At least that is what they are telling us, and it will be the best case scenario. I know some of these places are saying locked down for thirty days. That still brings us right around that same time, end of April/early May.

Like I mentioned before, Beth works for Mecklenburg County here in North Carolina, and her supervisor told her that they expect this to run forty-five days from March 19th. If I have done my counting correctly on my fingers and toes, that means May the third. But I do not know. That is just a guess, but it does take us well beyond Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. You can expect a lot of people to go stir crazy and by the end of it, we may all be a little bit mad. And I mean crazy, not upset. Some of us will be upset too. But we need to comply with these restrictions, and I am about to tell you why.

So if you would please go to Romans 13. This is one of those chapters you should know. This is Paul's admonition about government.

Some within the church of God, or maybe I should say slightly on the fringes of the churches of God, have intimated, if not outright declared, that the churches of God should defy the government on these regulations because they infringe on our ability to keep the Sabbath and to gather together and have a holy convocation. Now, I would perhaps be more with them, more agreeing with them if these regulations were intended to suppress our freedom of worship. But that is not the case. They are not there because someone behind the curtain in government is trying to kill Christianity. There is no indication of that. This is a public health matter, not a religious suppression or persecution type of matter. It is all about suppressing and containing the spread of a contagious disease and that is how we have got to look at this. Not as big government, big anti-God government trying to squash us poor Christians and keep us from from worshipping as we should be able to in this nation under the First Amendment.

**Romans 13:1-7** Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. [See why I am saying we

should comply here.] For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister [This is talking about worldly leaders.] to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister [or His servant], an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience sake. [So he is adding another little bit here, which we will get to in a moment.] For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

Also in this idea is that it is not a religious thing. I just wanted to mention this. Beth came home yesterday and she told me that Mecklenburg County, the county that contains Charlotte, North Carolina, their government has specifically not prohibited churches from conducting services because of fears of greater trouble and lawsuits if they should interfere with religious freedom. So they made a point of going to their legal counsel and finding out what they could do, and their legal counsel advised them not to restrict churches because they are worried about the backlash from that. So they have made recommendations and a lot of churches are complying with the recommendations, but towards churches, at least in Mecklenburg County and perhaps in all of North Carolina, I am not sure, the maximum number of attendees at church services is still only a strong *recommendation*. It is not a requirement. So if they wanted to, they could have 100/200 there in Mecklenburg County for their church services. But a lot of the churches are complying with the overall recommendations that have been given by the county, the city, and the state, as well as the federal government.

Here in Romans 13, the apostle Paul makes his case that if we believe that God is sovereign and that we believe He knows what is going on, as in Isaiah 40, and we believe that if He is working in our best interests, then the only thing that we can conclude is that He has either directly installed or allowed the human leadership over us. So if we believe God is sovereign and all that comes with that, then that means that we have been given the leadership that He wants us to have at this time. He is in control. That is what sovereignty

means: that He is sovereign over *all* things. A sovereign is one who rules and He has control.

And then we have to add in this little bit. He considers us the apple of His eye. We are His children. We are the ones He loves. And so do you not think that He will make things work out for us according to His will and not the will of some silly assemblyman, councilman, senator, representative, president? God is way above all of those and His eye is on us and He will do the best for us that He wants us to have. Remember what A. W. Tozer said. He has not surrendered control. He is still in charge because, as we have said in many sermons, He is still on His throne.

So Paul concludes that we should not resist our leaders, whom he calls God's servants, God's ministers for good. They are there because God put them there to do us good. And so Paul says we should not resist them because it would be like resisting God Himself. His act put them there and if we rebel against those people whom He put there, we are in effect rebelling against what He has done. So we should refrain from setting ourselves purposely against them. We do not want to be on that side of things, and note this, especially if the laws and regulations they impose upon us do not contradict God's laws and principles. Because if you start opposing the legitimate authority for things that God says, "I like that, that's a good thing," then we are very much putting ourselves against God and His law.

**I Peter 2:13** Submit yourselves to every ordinance for the Lord's sake.

He takes a little bit different tack in explaining things here, but it comes down to it, it is the same as the apostle Paul. Peter says that we obey those leaders that have been placed over us out of obligation to God. We obey them because we are obeying God. Because we love and obey God, we submit to those He has placed over us. So if they are telling us to do something that is right and good, then we should comply.

In verse 5 of Romans 13, Paul teaches us that we must be subject to them not just to avoid their wrath against evildoers, but for conscience sake. This is another point that I mentioned as I went through there that we would take up. That is, we must act according to our sense of right and wrong. That is



basically what our conscience is, our internal sense of what is right and wrong. Now conscience can be formed that is not perfectly right, but usually a conscience, if it has been brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord, let us say, will have most of the boundaries pretty well defined. And so if we act against our conscience in any way, we are told in God's Word that it is a sin to us. You find that in Romans 14, verse 23. "Whatever is not from faith is sin."

So if we are not sure about it and we do it anyway, it is a sin to us. If we act against what we feel is right, then it is a sin to us. So if the state or whatever the authority is over us, does what is right, let us say in calling a quarantine, then our conscience forbids us or should forbid us to act against it because it is right, is not it? Then the flipside would also apply. If the state does something wrong, tells us to do something we should not do (Let us just bring the Sabbath into this.), say that you cannot keep the Sabbath and that they will haul Sabbath keepers into jail or chop their heads off or however far it would go, then our conscience would indeed forbid us to obey or support it. We could not under those terms follow what the state, whatever the authority is, says to do because the state is clearly wrong. It is both against our conscience and, more importantly, against the law of God—against what God wants.

So this is our out, as it were, in terms of complying with what the state says. This is our out in terms of submission to the authority over us when it is wrong and when it is clearly wrong. This is the time we would say, like the apostles, "For we must obey God rather than man." They said this in Acts 5: 29 and we would therefore have to take our lumps, whatever they happen to be. But as I implied a second ago, what the state has said to us must *clearly* be wrong. Generally, though, overall we should cooperate with state and, as Paul goes on in these next few verses, render the appropriate service as in paying our taxes, paying whatever custom, or following along with the customs of the country, giving fear or respect to the leaders and giving them honor. Those are things we should do.

Remember I said we should do this out of obligation to God, not necessarily because they are wonderful people, and a lot of times they are not. They are not godly at all. But we do this because God says honor the king and that sort of thing.

In this particular case with the coronavirus, we should cooperate with the government's efforts to stop the spread of this disease. It is for our good. It is for the good of all of us and God is all for doing good, is He not?

Let us get to the specific thing that they have asked or they have recommended or they have imposed depending on where you happen to be, Let us go to Leviticus 13. This is another one of those chapters where you think, "Ah, the leprosy stuff and all the quarantine rules." So we are going to read the first eight verses of Leviticus 13 and just see what is here in Scripture that God says we should be doing in cases like this. I am not going to go through the whole chapter because it is a repetition of a lot of the same principles of quarantine. Now notice how this opens.

**Leviticus 13:1-3** And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying [Where does this come from? Where does this law come from? God Himself. He created the law of quarantine, and He gave it to His people to comply with in situations like this.]: "When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling, a scab, or a bright spot, and it becomes on the skin of his body like a leprous sore, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests. The priest shall look at the sore on the skin of the body; and if the hair on the sore has turned white, and the sore appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a leprous sore. Then the priest shall examine him, and pronounce him unclean."

He, the priest here, acts in the manner of a physician. They are the ones that had been given the instruction about what to look for here. So the priest goes and sees this particular person, and he notices this sore, and he inspects it very closely to see how it matches with what God says here. And he sees that he has indeed got a contagion, which is called here leprosy.

I might mention here that it is skin diseases that are mentioned most specifically because, overall, the society had no awareness of viruses or bacteria or stuff like that. So what God does is put this in the language of a sore that you can actually see on your skin. They did not have microscopes. They could not do the tests that we could do today with our technology. They had have as instruction something that they could actually see with

their eyes. But that does not mean that this applies only to any kind of skin disease. We can use the principles that are here to apply to any kind of contagious disease because we have methods and means to figure it out now with what we have know.

So the priest here, we see, gives the person a good looking over and makes a determination. He is unclean.

**Leviticus 13:4** But if the bright spot is white on the skin of his body, and does not appear to be deeper than the skin, and its hair has not turned white, then the priest shall isolate [There is our word here. This could also be translated very much as quarantine.] the one who has the sore seven days [one week].

That is important. It is very important that this isolation happened for one seven-day period, one week. It is not six days and a couple hours or whatever. It is seven days. It is one week, and I mention that because people say that the quarantine keeps us from keeping the Sabbath or attending holy convocation. Under God's rules of quarantine, if you had a sickness or whatnot and the priest put you under quarantine, *you could not go to church* or whatever congregational gathering that was there. You could not come to the Holy Place. You were unclean. You are not allowed there.

So saying that quarantine imposes restrictions on our keeping the Sabbath, it is right there in the Word. If you are quarantined and it is over a Sabbath, and if you have seven days that you have to be quarantined, it *will* be over a Sabbath, either on the front end, the back end, or in the middle somewhere, you are not allowed to attend services. That is the way it works. It is not infringing on your right to keep the Sabbath. This is one of those cases where a higher law takes precedence. That is the law of love, that you are being quarantined so that you do not give this contagious disease to other people whom you are probably going to interact with at a church service.

The law of love trumps the law of the Sabbath just as Jesus said. What is Matthew 12 about? Going through the fields on the Sabbath. Or that the priests who do all their work on the Sabbath? There is a greater, higher law

than just the fact that you are supposed to keep the Sabbath normally. This is an abnormal time, and you are given permission from God—actually, He tells you very sternly, "Stay home!" Stay away.

**Leviticus 13:5-8** And the priest shall examine him on the seventh day; and indeed, if the sore appears to be as it was, and the sore has not spread on the skin, then the priest shall isolate him another seven days. [So if he gets isolated for the first seven days and it looks like he is going to do okay, well God puts him in for another seven days just to be sure. Fourteen day quarantine right there.] Then the priest shall examine him again on the seventh day; and indeed if the sore has darkened and the sore is not spread on the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him clean; it is only a scab, and he shall wash his clothes and be clean. [He is released from his quarantine after two weeks here.] But if the scab should at all spread over the skin, after he has been seen by the priest for his cleansing, he shall be seen by the priest again. And if the priest sees that the scab has indeed spread on the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean. It is leprosy.

And that was a very bad determination if it should be called that because in these times, without the intervention of God, leprosy was basically a death sentence.

But (no need to get morose), we are talking about a virus, and the principles apply the same way. It is a good thing. It is a godly thing. It is a divinely appointed thing for a person to be quarantined under conditions of a contagious disease. That is the way God set it up. So this procedure is directly from the Lord. He clearly supports the public health measure that is described here on the instructions.

So we do not need to worry about, if we are under quarantine, whether we are keeping the Sabbath properly or not. Obviously, you should do what you can, but if you cannot come to church for any reason because you are under quarantine, then you are not breaking the Sabbath. That is allowed under the quarantine, that you should not come to church. Actually, your staying at home is an act of love and should be followed in all cases of contagion. It is just a good thing so it does not spread. You do not want to give this thing to

another person. The quarantine confines the contagion to the person or the person's immediate family and does not spread it any further. And that, in my book, is a good thing.

The only thing is, we have to endure the isolation, we have to endure this quarantine, and that is what, maybe, is going to be the hardest for us going forward. That we are going to have to find things to do. As a minister, I have to tell you here you should pray and study more now that you have more time. So what the government is recommending in terms of quarantine is a good thing overall.

Now where you are maybe it might be overblown. It might be going a little bit too far in some areas, because men do tend to go to extremes. Have you noticed that? We think if something is good, then *all of it* is even better. And sometimes that does not work out too well. But from God's law, we are required to comply with those orders by our respect for God and respect for His laws, this particular ordinance of quarantine. If you will go to II Kings 15, I just want to make one small point here because sometimes we get in our mind that this does not apply to me. This is about as Azariah. He is also known in the Bible as Uzziah. But he got little big in his head and he decided one time he would join the priests in doing what they would do. But he was not a priest. He was a king.

**II Kings 15:5** Then the Lord struck the king, so that he was a leper until the day of his death; so he dwelt in an isolated house. And Jotham the king's son was over the royal house, judging the people of the land.

So even the king was bound by this law of quarantine. He could not get away with it and go to the throne room and rule. Jotham had to come and do all the the work for him for the rest of his life. To the end of his days, he dwelt in his own house, separated from other people. I mean, that was not just a couple-week quarantine, that was until he died! Even a king of the line of David was not an exception to the rule. So this ordinance of quarantine does not play favorites. It applies to both prince and peasant, man or woman, rich or poor. You name your category, it applies.

Let us go back to Exodus 15. We are going to hopefully bring in a little bit more encouragement now that I told you what you got to do. The children of Israel had just come out of Egypt. They had just gone through the Red Sea and they had won the big victory, and so they march on from the banks of the Red Sea.

**Exodus 15:22-26** So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they had come to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" So he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet. [By a miracle here He sweetened these waters and gave them water to drink. He fulfilled their need.] There He [God] made a statute and an ordinance for them [another law here], and there He tested them, and said [This is the part I was leading to the whole time. Notice how this is worded. It starts on a condition.], "If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do all that is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you."

This is one of the first statements, if not *the* first statement, in all the Bible on (I do not know if we can actually say this) the covenant of healing. God makes a deal with them. It is a compact and He starts with our response or our part in it. He says, "You have to do these things" and He covers all His bases. You have to diligently heed the voice of the Lord. We have to do what is right in His sight. We have to listen or give ear to His His commandments and keep all His statutes.

If we have done those things, if we are, in other words, in a right relationship with Him and we are following Him and are faithful toward Him, then He says He will heal all our diseases. He will not give us the things that are going around in the world, to those people in the world, He will heal us. He will protect us from these things. Of course, this is a *huge* condition, all of

those things together—that we are His followers, that we do what is right and good, that we have a proper relationship with Him.

And then, as He is finishing here, He seals this, it is almost like an oath, with His own name. He gives them a new way to identify Him, which is "the Lord who heals you." Yahweh Ropheka, as it is in the Hebrew. But that is a name He gave Himself, that He is the Lord who heals us. So we have His word here and His seal on it by His name, that He will keep us safe from things like Covid-19 if we are spiritually on the ball, if we are playing by His rules, if we are following Him, if we are trying our best to have a right and proper relationship with Him.

Now, we are going to flip through a few scriptures here. God's promise of healing is repeated as we go through some of these things. Let us just go first to Exodus 23. This is in the Old Covenant as it is winding down here. He is talking about obeying the Angel that was going with them and here He talks about not bowing down to other gods.

**Exodus 23:24-25** "You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them [meaning those in the land of Canaan], nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars. So you shall serve the Lord your God."

Now remember, we are comparing this particularly to what we saw there in chapter 15. So if you do not worship idols and you serve the Lord your God, those were the conditions that had to be met. Right?

**Exodus 23:25** "So you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you."

It is basically the same thing we saw in Exodus 15. If you have a right relationship with God and you are keeping His commandments, one of His promises in this covenant is that He would keep sickness away. Let us move on to Psalm 103 and we will read the first three verses here. You know these pretty well, I am sure.

**Psalm 103:1-3** Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases.

So here He promises in the psalm that just as He will forgive us for our iniquities if we come before Him and repent and have a proper attitude and are striving for putting on His character, that He is going to forgive our sins. Well, in the same way, just as we saw there in Exodus chapters 15 and 23, He will do the same with our diseases. He will heal us of those things. Now that is a big ask of us I know, because people have a hard time following God. But this is one of the benefits, as it says here, of His providence toward us, that He is going to heal us and have our backs in terms of our physical health—if we follow Him and do as He says.

Psalm 91:1-10 is another promise of healing. A thousand at your left hand and ten thousand at your right, and that sort of thing, will fall. And He will not let all those plagues come near you.

This idea, this principle, comes into the New Testament pretty much undisturbed. Let us first go to I John 3. It is maybe said more generally in these terms than what was in the Old Testament, but the same principle applies. The apostle writes,

**I John 3:22** And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

This would obviously cover asking for healing for a disease. The same principle holds true. If we are keeping His commandments in doing what is right, He is going to respond to us. This is essentially here in I John 3 a rephrasing of what Jesus says in His final words to His disciples there in John 14, 15, and 16. In other words, when our relationship with God conforms to the terms of the covenant, we will receive what we ask for. Now there are other stipulations, but I think we should take that as a major overall principle.



Let us go back to John 14. We will be hopping, skipping, and jumping through these chapters because He mentions it several times and when God mentions something so often, you know that it is something that He really wants to let us know is important. Jesus says to the disciples,

**John 14:13-16** "And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, that He may give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever."

I just wanted to read that to let you know that the commandments were on His mind when He told them to ask for things in His name.

**John 15:7** "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."

**John 15:10** "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."

**John 15:16** "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you."

All of these ideas air swirling through here. He is just putting them different ways. But this is how it works.

**John 16:23-24** "And in that day, you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

**John 16:26-27** "In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father

Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God."

He says, "You don't have to ask Me. You can go straight to the Father because He loves you and He is going to give you what you ask in My name." Now it is important that we understand that "in My name" means with My authority and according to My perfect character. He is not going to just give you something because you ask of it in Jesus' name. It has got to be something that Jesus Himself, as we have said many times before, would Himself ask for.

So here, even though He mentions it so often in these three chapters, even here this is not a blanket promise. The conditions are founded in obedience and submission to the way and character of God. We need to be keeping our relationship with Jesus Christ and with God the Father in tip-top condition.

Let us go back to Matthew 4. I just want you to notice how how big a part healing was in Jesus' ministry.

**Matthew 4:23-24** And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them.

It is just a plain statement. They brought people who were diseased and He healed them. It was part of His ministry—and a major part of it—listed right there alongside the preaching of the Gospel. His protection and healing are though according to His will, yet we find that He is quite willing to heal.

Let us look at Matthew 8, verse one. Here is a leper again.

**Matthew 8:1-3** When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped

Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."  
Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Again, this was not a blanket promise, a blanket thing. This man had the right attitude. But notice, in terms of this not being a blanket promise that He is going to heal us if we ask Him for it. First, we need to remember Hebrews 9:27. "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." We must all die one time at one time or another. At the end of our lives, we are going to die. That is a promise we have. It is not, maybe, very nice to think about, but we all will die. It is His will. We can say that at some point or another, we will die, and it will be at a time that satisfies Him as to our spiritual state. Remember, He says, "And after this the judgment." Our death will be the end of our period of judgment, and the final judgment will be made then.

So our death will be a time that satisfies Him as to our spiritual state and will be at a time that is the best for us and our loved ones. We have to have that confidence. Who knows? He may use our death as a witness to others. Jesus Christ's own death was the greatest witness that was ever made, other than maybe His life. But it made a great witness to the world. His apostles also died deaths that were witnesses to the world. And He may use ours in a lesser but similar way, say, as a witness to our family members or to friends or acquaintances, witnessing to them of our faith and character that we endured to the end or what have you.

Now the second point. A major condition of healing, along with obedience, is faith. We are here in Matthew. Let us go one more chapter forward to Matthew 9. Here He is in the midst of going to heal the daughter of this ruler:

**Matthew 9:20-22** And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment. For she said to herself, "If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well." [She was very confident.] But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, "Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well." And the woman was made well from that hour.

**Matthew 9:27-29** When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" And they said to Him, "Yes, Lord." Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it be to you." And their eyes were opened.

They were, of course, healed of their blindness. So faith is a condition.

**James 5:14-16** Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. [That is, the name of the Lord is in there.] And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

It is very clear that we need to have faith. We need to trust God. We have to be confident that He is going to heal us. We have to know that He has that power and that He will do what is best for us. We have to trust Him. We have to realize that He is working on our behalf. We have to make peace with that—whatever He decides that it is, that will be done. And then we have got to move forward. It is like the children of Israel at the Red Sea. God said to Moses, "Quit crying out to Me! Go forward, move! I'm doing this. Go!" Do not hang back in fear. Go forward in faith that God is going to work things out. Because at that time, when He told them that, Pharaoh's armies were right on their heels. So He said, "Don't worry, don't be anxious. Don't huddle in fear. Move forward. Have faith in Me that I'm working things out."

We need to have the kind of faith that the apostle Paul had in Philippians 1. A kind of faith that feels peace and comfort and acceptance of God in His decision. Notice what he said because he was here in prison. He had chains around him, on his legs and who knows where else. He was not free. But he says,

**Philippians 1:19-20** For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ [He says, "I'm going to be rescued from this. I'm going to be delivered from this."], according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

He did not know if he was going to be hauled out of the cell and have his head chopped off at any moment. But this is the faith that he had. That sword was his disease, as it were, hanging over him. But he was confident, he had boldness before God and before the people that it would work out. And so he says here,

**Philippians 1:21-25** For to me, to live is Christ, and to die his gain. ["Hey, I'm going to live in the life of Christ, if I live. And if I die, oh, that's even better," he says.] But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. [He did not know which to do, which would be better.] For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ [Boy, would that have solved a lot of his problems, kept him from a lot of pain, brought him to his reward in eternal life.], which is far better. [Yeah, that is the best thing of all. But, he says also] Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith.

He was willing to do whatever God wanted him to do. He was willing to die. He was willing to live. He was willing to work and serve, and he was at peace with that. He was comforted that God was the one who was controlling his life and controlling the things around him and so he could write something like this. "Hey, it's a great thing if I live and be able to preach to you for longer, but it's even greater if I die and go to be with Christ," as he says, because the next thing he would know, he would hear, would be the call of Jesus Christ to come out of his tomb, his grave, whatever. So he was happy, he was content with whatever God decided to

do. He was certain, like A. W. Tozer said, that God had not ceded control. He was still in control and He would be in control and his life or his death was to him a matter of God's will and not his own.

We are here in Philippians. Let us go to chapter 4 because he kind of continues this theme.

**Philippians 4:6-7** Be anxious for nothing [he certainly was not], but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, . . .

People who do not really understand God, do not really have the Holy Spirit to really make godly evaluations of what is going on, they do not understand this peace that would come over a person of faith, even though the times *should be* producing anxiety. But a person with God's Spirit, trusting God, need not worry but put everything in God's hands through prayer.

**Philippians 4:7** and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

What a great sentry we have on our hearts and minds, this peace of God that allows us to look at the world realistically, that is, from God's point of view. Look at our lives from His point of view and not be concerned. That is just not human, is it? That is not the way humans work. They are very jealous of their lives. They are very jealous of what goes on around them and the things that are coming upon them. They want it all to work out for themselves or whatever their selfish desires are.

But those who are godly do not need to have that worry. Fear is the natural human response to trouble. We have this "fight or flight" mechanism in us. When things go wrong, we either put up our dukes or we run away, and in both cases they are part of fear. It is just a matter of how do you face it or do you face it all? There is still fear there and your heart is pumping, the adrenaline is flowing, and you either react one way or the other.

But we, the elect of God, have been chosen to be *not entirely human*. Paul's reaction there in Philippians 1 was not human. You know what it was? His reaction was divine. It was godly. It was the one of the most perfect examples of suppressing the human will to the divine will. So he did not have to worry about fear. In fact, he was not afraid. This peace of God had come over him and he was willing to do whatever God decided.

We have been called out of this world to live by faith, not by sight. Not by human nature, but by the nature of God. And we can live by faith because of God's love for us and ours for Him. We know He loves us, and we are going to respond in love for Him, and such love we find in I John 4:18, casts out fear. God is in control, is He not? Of course He is. He will make everything work out just the way He wants it and for a good end. We can thus call upon Him about our needs and we can do what those children of Israel did at the Red Sea. Move forward in peace, knowing that God has our back. In confidence, realizing that we will come out just fine on the other side, knowing that He has both heard us and will act in our best interest.

That is the way it works with God's children. There is no chance involved. It is certain that God will do what is best.

If you will go ahead and shut your Bibles and just listen to me read two psalms, Psalm 145 and Psalm 146. I just want you to listen to the confidence in these psalms in times of trouble. Actually I should say in all times.

**Psalm 145:1-21** I will extol you, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts. I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works. Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, and I will declare Your greatness. They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, and shall sing of Your righteousness. The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. All Your works shall praise you, O

Lord, and Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, and talk of Your power, to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations. The Lord upholds all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. The Lord is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works. The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and save them. The Lord preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy. My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord, and all flesh shall bless His holy name forever and ever.

**Psalm 146:1-10** Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! While I live I will praise the Lord; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish. Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them; who keeps truth forever, who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; the Lord raises those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow; but the way of the wicked He turns upside down. The Lord shall reign forever—your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the Lord!