

Promised: Protection And Healing

Conditions to Consider

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Without question, the news of the past week and a half or so has been anthrax. This goes along too, hand in hand, with the news that we continue to get about terrorism—because the anthrax scares are thought to be terrorists or a copycat type of thing. But it has been on the minds of just about everyone in the nation. The news media has really pushed it; and just about every day we have heard of new targets of the bio-terrorists, whoever they happen to be.

First we heard about *The Star* down there in Florida. And then we heard ABC news, and then Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle's office. It got to House Speaker Dennis Hastert's office. We heard about CBS—Dan Rather and some people that worked with him—being exposed to anthrax. And they just recently found a couple postal workers in New Jersey being exposed to it as well.

Talk show hosts, on TV and on radio, have been constant "anthrax" for the last couple of weeks or so. It is getting quite boring. It is the same information over and over and over again. I heard one of them had a headline, in a newspaper, "All spores all the time." It reminded me of KNX out there in L.A.—"All news all the time." You can also say it is quite "springing" to listen to the radio these days. Cipro prescription sales are booming, with prices rising. We just heard from Martin that you can use oil of oregano. It does just about the same thing to kill the anthrax.

But everybody seems to be waiting with bated breath for the next outbreak to occur and to be announced. Who knows, it may be in your city? It has gotten so bad that even the House [of Representatives] shut down for the first time in its history (I think I heard yesterday). Well, it probably did shut down during the War of 1812, because the British were coming in; but since that time (even during the Civil War and other things that have happened—such as World War I and World War II) it did not shut down. Denny Hastert and the other leaders there decided to shut it down, and they are gone. Many of them fled Washington, just about, for fear of their lives.

Cooler heads have tried to stem the hysteria over anthrax. It is not widespread. There have been either real exposures or fake/hoax exposures in many places. But, as far as I understand, in the United States it is just Florida, New Jersey, New York, and Washington D.C. And just today I heard that someone in Pennsylvania had it, but that was because he lives right across the New Jersey border.

Most of the exposures have been of the cutaneous form—which means that it is the stuff that gets on your skin. And that is easily treatable with the Cipro and other drugs. Really, if you are of pretty good health, you should be able to fight that off because anthrax does its worse work when there are a lot of spores there and your natural immune system cannot handle it all. It is the inhaled form that is the more deadly of the two, and that has not been found a lot. I think there is some, but it has been mostly the skin form.

Thinking about it, there has really only been one death. John McCain said recently that more people have been struck by lightning in the past 10 days than have died from anthrax. And that is true. This thing is just being taken way out of proportion, to its harm to the people of the United States. An average citizen's chance of contracting anthrax is less than winning a big lottery. We would not do that anyway. But, if we did, our chances would be even less than actually winning the big money (the jackpot), or by being struck by lightning, and probably than being struck by a meteorite or something like that. So your chances of getting it are very slim.

Also another thing, just to throw this out, is that anthrax is a naturally occurring disease. Dead animals tend to grow anthrax. Especially, I believe, sheep tend to be ones that produce this. I know that I read yesterday that wool separators (people who separate wool for a living, once it comes off the sheep) are very likely to be exposed to anthrax almost constantly. That is because they are getting wool off of sheep, and anthrax tends to live on sheep.

I do not think we have any wool separators in the church, as far as my knowledge goes. So we have no need, then, to fall into the terror trap that some in this world around us have already succumbed to. Like I said, Cipro sales are really going whacko. There is only one company in this country that produces the stuff, and they are making money hand over fist. They are a German company, by the way—Bayer. I just heard also that Canada was to revoke the patent on Cipro (or whatever it was that Bayer was producing) so that, I guess, they could have their own companies produce it and not let Bayer make all the money.

But we do not need to be terrorized by this. First, let us face facts here. We are nobodies. Right now, nobody wants us dead. Who would want to kill us? What kind of power do we have to affect anything in this world? Those Islamic terrorists do not even know that we exist. So, unless you have some high up job in the government or in the media, our chances of being exposed are fairly small. I guess that probably the greatest exposure would be to postal workers, of just "the average Joe" types. We do have some

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of those in the church; but for most of us, our chances of being targeted for anthrax are pretty low.

Secondly, most of us live pretty far away from where the exposures have taken place. We do have people who live in Florida, and New Jersey, and New York, and Pennsylvania of course, and near Washington, D.C. But a great many more of us live in areas far away from that. And those people who live closer have to be a little bit more vigilant; but, then again, their chances of getting exposed to it are pretty slim.

Third, many of us are in reasonably good health. If we have been watching our diet, and doing the things that we are supposed to do in keeping our bodies strong, we could probably fight off an exposure to it—unless it was one of those strong ones where we got a lot of spores, and then other measures might need to be taken.

But fourth and most importantly of course, is that God has promised us protection and healing. That's what this sermon is designed to discuss: God's promises of protection from and healing of diseases. And it can go out to other forms of protection as well—protection from terrorism, protection from muggings and things like that. We are not totally immune to those sorts of things. We are not totally immune to diseases. But we do have God's promises that He will be with us.

I would like to go over this today, as much as we can, in a mature way. That is, the way a mature Christian should look at threats like these—terrorism, disease, crime, and other sorts of things that come at us from outside, things that we have little control over but we can sometimes be exposed to. I do not want to look at this naively or blindly. We need to look at these things realistically—from God's perspective, and not from our own perspective (which we will see later is quite narrow). We need to look at these in a much larger playing field, a larger point of view, so that we can see what the promises really tell us—what they really say, what they really are. And how we can trust in them and be assured that God has our best interests at heart.

We will have to see then, through this sermon, that these promises are not totally absolute. That is, that every time (with whatever comes up) that God is automatically going to protect us or heal us. That is what I mean by that. They are not unconditional—meaning that just because you believe that God is going to automatically protect you and heal you of whatever comes, there are certain things that we must be doing. There are certain things that are necessary.

And there are other factors that come into this other than just these conditions that we have to think about. We have to see God's sovereignty in His promises, and look at it

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from this mature, realistic point of view that if God has another idea in mind—if He has something else that He wants done—His will be done! And, if we must die because *His will* must be done, then we will die. We have to think about *His overall purpose*—that there are overriding factors in His purpose that must come first. And each one of us, in comparison to that purpose, is very little (and means little). And we have to keep that in mind.

We also have to keep in mind that His work in us individually has a beginning and an end. Most of the time, it is the end of our lives. And there is going to come a time that we will die. So we realistically, in a mature way, have to remember that it is given to man once to die; but that is not the end. So our physical death is not something that we need to get overly concerned about—if we have faith and trust in God—because He has got something better prepared for us beyond this physical life.

There are other factors that I will not get into that I probably have not even thought of yet. But there are many things. We cannot just say, just because God's Word says that He will heal us, that it is a blanket promise for all time and every circumstance. We have to look at this as mature Christians and understand these broader concepts.

Let us start in Isaiah 45 please. I want to start with the idea that God is sovereign and that God is God. And in these subjects, that is really what we have to remember first off—and always. That is, *what God is!*

Isaiah 45:18 For thus says the LOORD, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: "I am the LOORD, and there is no other."

Boy, is that a list of qualifications! Or, how would you say that? A resume, or what? "I am the Lord who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who established it, one who didn't create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited. There's no other like Me!" That tells you a great deal about where we are coming from here.

Isaiah 45:19 I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth; I did not say to the seed of Jacob, 'Seek Me, in vain;' I, the LOORD, speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.

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He has been very 'up front' about all He has told us to do—all He has told Israel to do. One way that you can look at that is that He is the One that says what is right and what is wrong. He is the One who gives **the standard** of what is righteousness. And then He backs it up by what He speaks and what He does. So, here He is **the pinnacle** of character, of righteousness, of everything that is good. And He says, "Everything that I have said to you, it's not in vain. It's not futile. It's not just something I spoke just to speak—to get your attention. It's going to come to pass." That is what He's saying.

Isaiah 45:21 Tell and bring forth your case; . . .

He is saying this to us. Or, in the context, it is to those that worship idols. But just take it personally at this point.

Isaiah 45:21 . . . yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the LORD?

He is saying, "Can you come up with anything that will refute what I've said here? Is there anybody else—any other being, any other god, any sort of divinity or what have you—that has said these things and has brought them to pass? Can anybody show proof that they even come close to what I am?" God says, "Bring it forth. Let Me see the evidence."

Isaiah 45:21-22 . . . Have not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior; there is none besides Me. [How many times does He have to say that to us?] Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

He is saying that not only is He the God of Israel, but He is the God of all the earth. Everyone can look to Him. He made it all. He is the God of it all. He is the one that is manipulating it all. There is no other being that can even come close to doing these things.

Isaiah 45:23 I have sworn by Myself

We find out in other places that He swears by Himself because there is nothing else to swear by. He is the pinnacle of what one swears by. And so, what does He swear

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by—but Himself? That is the only sure and firm thing in the whole universe.

Isaiah 45:23 . . . The word [His Word] has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath.

What He is saying is that He has decreed that the whole world is going to bow down to Him. He told us that He did not say this in vain. It is going to take place. So He sent His Word out in righteousness, and it is going to come to pass—eventually.

Isaiah 46:5 To whom will you liken Me, and make Me equal and compare Me, that we should be alike?

It is a rhetorical question, of course. There is no one. Nothing is like God.

Isaiah 46:8-11 Remember this, and show yourselves men; [He is saying "Admit it. Be a man and admit when you are wrong."] Recall to mind, O you transgressors. Remember the former things of old, for I am God and there is no other. I am God, and there is none like Me. Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done. Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.' Calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed, I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass, I have purposed it; I will also do it.

That is the God we serve. That is the God who is making these promises. And if He has spoken, He will bring it to pass. But He has a purpose too, that He is working out. He has given prophecies, in these very books of the Bible that we are reading that tell us the way things are going to work out. And, because He is God, He inhabits eternity. Because He has the power to do anything that He chooses to do, He is going to make sure that they come to pass. He is sovereign over all. He has plainly declared what He is doing, and He will bring it to pass.

Who can stop Him? One has tried, and it is prophesied that he is going to fail—and *has* failed, time and time again. In his pride and stubbornness, he keeps failing because there is no other like God, who is sovereign over all. What He says, He does. It is just that simple. His counsel shall stand, He says.

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From this we can distill one clear, overriding factor when we take these promises into consideration. **God's sovereignty takes first place in every area of life.** It does not matter what it is, what is going on, what the situation is, who is involved—God's will, His pleasure, His sovereignty, His purpose comes first. He is doing something, and we are not going to stop Him. We are not going to get in His way.

That makes Him sound like a tyrant of sorts, but His will is *first priority* in the universe. What God desires, what He proposes, what He wills is always the highest priority and supreme factor in any decision. If we face persecution and He determines with His overriding will that it will further His purposes that we die, then we die. If there is a reason for it and He thinks that it is going to make His purpose come to pass, well, that is one of the sacrifices one has said he will make when he takes the vow of baptism. God's purpose overrides all and is supreme.

How many biblical examples of martyrs do we have, and non-biblical examples of martyrs, who had to face this very choice and come to this very conclusion? Look at the example of Stephen, which we will. But many of them faced it very happily (to use that term). They were very glad to sacrifice for God. How often does Paul say that it was his greatest honor to bear the same stripes of Christ? That is, that in his body he had similar stripes as what Jesus Himself went through.

I do not want to glorify martyrdom—especially in this time, where Islamic terrorists are glorying in their own pagan type of martyrdom. But still, in the Bible, there are very clear passages that show that *if* God chooses to allow us to die for Him *then* it is just fine. Of course, we do not die taking others out with us. There is one big difference in that. We die because we want to bear in ourselves the persecution and suffering of our Lord. There is a difference. It is not the same. So, let us go see Stephen's example.

Acts 7:54-60 When they [the Jews] heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; [I always thought that would look funny, but the situation certainly was not funny.] and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen saw God. Or, he saw Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God. And he knew that God *could* save him—from the Jews, from that stoning. There was Jesus Christ looking right at him. But Jesus Christ and God the Father chose not to. There was ***an overriding purpose*** to Stephen's martyrdom. For one thing, it has been a sterling example down through the ages; and I think that is why it is there. This is one of the very few, actual narratives of a martyrdom. Others are just mentioned—like the martyrdom of James, the son of Zebedee. And it is simply mentioned that Herod killed James with a sword, I believe it says; and that is it.

But with Stephen's martyrdom, we have blow by blow coverage—because it is such a wonderful example of his willingness to sacrifice for his Lord and Master, and to give himself as a witness after having preached the gospel to these Jews. They were not at all convicted and rejected it. But it had another purpose too because it mentions, there in verse 58, that they laid their garments at the feet of one named Saul. And it is just a few chapters later that we find out what God had in mind for that man named Saul—who later became Paul, the apostle. Fourteen books of the Bible were written by that one, who we figure (from what the Bible says), was the instigator of all of this against Stephen.

That is an example of God's overriding purposes—His sovereignty—playing a large role in this man Stephen's life, as well as Paul's. But Stephen's life was *taken* in order for God's purpose to move forward—which was the conversion of the Gentiles, with Paul at the helm. God had a greater purpose in mind; and Stephen's life, then, was *forfeited*—because it advanced that [purpose].

Obviously, God knew that Stephen himself (his character) was certainly prepared for His Kingdom. That just shines through the narrative here. Even though Stephen had been a member of God's church for only a very short time, his attitude was wonderful; and he was a devout person who did everything right, it seems. He was willing to stand up for God; and God allowed him to die, which is my next point here.

This is the end of Paul's life. In a way, this is a continuum here. We started with Stephen being instrumental in the conversion of Paul, and now here (in II Timothy 4) Paul is at the end of his life. He is looking back on his life, and looking forward to what is going to be happening to him in the next few days or weeks.

II Timothy 4:6-8 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the

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crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Did you recognize the **confidence** in that? "I will . . . I have . . . He will . . ." Paul has no doubts that he is going to die. Paul has no doubts also that he has lived a righteous life, and he has done what God gave him to do. He has grown, and he has matured, and he has become maybe as perfect as he could in this life. He was also very confident—assured to the depth of his being—that God was going to raise him up, and give him a crown of righteousness and his reward. It is just **bold** language here: "I will . . . I have . . . He will . . ." And he faced it with this same boldness, and assurance, and confidence.

My next point is that our level of **personal growth** has to be factored in. Paul had lived a good long life. He had done the work God had sent him to do. And now, because God's purpose must go on, his martyrdom was assured in a way (you might say) because he was now able to make an example for the rest of the world. That is, by his martyrdom—and specifically to the Romans.

Do you remember what Mr. Armstrong used to say? It used to get quite a few people mad, and it certainly got the Tkach group mad—because Mr. Armstrong used to say that we must **qualify** for God's Kingdom. Well, Paul had qualified; and he knew that he had qualified. He knew that, by God's grace, he would be saved. But he also knew that he had done all the righteous things that God requires of His children. He knew that he had *grown in good works*. He knew that he had *grown in faith*. He knew that he had *grown in character*. And so, in that sense, he qualified **by fulfilling all righteousness** (or, as much of it as he could in his human life)—following the example of Jesus Christ, who Himself fulfilled all righteousness. Paul was just doing what God wants us all to do.

And so, because Paul had reached this point in his conversion, he was (in a way) *ready* to go. The threat of martyrdom came upon him, and he faced it very maturely. I am sure that there was fear and a great deal of emotion. I do not want to take that out of it. No one goes grinning to his death. But he was able to face it very calmly, from what we see here in II Timothy 4, because he knew that—in his checklist of all the things that he needed to get done—he was through. Then God could use him for whatever purpose beyond that was necessary.

II Timothy 4:17 But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me . . .

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He is talking about after his first offense, either before Nero or one of the other officers in the Roman court. I also should tell you that he was alone. None of the other people in Rome came to his defense, and so he felt alone. But he really was not alone. He says:

II Timothy 4:17 But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear . . .

He was speaking here, possibly, to the emperor. He did not have anybody to back him up. It was just Paul alone, in chains, giving his defense of why he was there—because he himself had appealed to Caesar at one point in his life. But there he was, preaching the gospel to the emperor.

Remember Mr. Armstrong used to say that he would go to kings and prime ministers because it was through them that he could reach the rest of the people? Well, this is maybe one of the places where he got that idea. It was by speaking to the very highest of Roman authorities that Paul considers that all the Gentiles might hear. He went to the very top. And he made **a witness**, then, before the emperor—or, at least, his court or some very high-ranking officials. He "made God's case" in front of them. He says:

II Timothy 4:17-18 . . . Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. [He compares it to Daniel's ordeal back there in Babylon.] And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!

This seems kind of contradictory, does it not? Earlier in the chapter, Paul was saying that he was not going to be delivered—that he was already poured out as a drink offering, and that he would be martyred. And then he says (here in verse 18) that God will deliver him. Well, it is not really contradictory because we are talking about a couple of different things here. It shows another side of the issue.

Paul compares his ordeal to Daniel's in the lion's den, as I mentioned. This is a key point. Both Paul's and Daniel's deliverance—meaning being saved from the mouth of the lion, let us say—both of them happened because God used them **to make a witness**. Paul made a witness before the Roman court, and Daniel made a witness before the Persian court. They both reached the highest levels of the power at the time. At the time of Daniel's being thrown to the lions, the Persians were number 1 in the world. They had a huge, vast empire that stretched from India, over into the Middle

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East, and down to Egypt and beyond. In Paul's time, in the 1st century, the Roman's controlled a vast amount of that same area, plus parts of Europe.

Both situations were designed to preach the gospel to these pagan emperors—to make sure there was a witness made. So they lived, and God pulled them through these things, because they had something else to do. God still had some work to do through them. Daniel lived for a few more years and got to see the seventy years come to an end, and the people begin to go back. But Paul had just a short time left; and he was able to finish these last couple of books of the Bible, give Timothy especially (and then, through him, us) some very pointed instruction about living in the time of the end. Then he was ready to be finally **offered up**.

The second thing that we can see here is that Paul's real faith in God's deliverance was that God would save him so that he would be in His Kingdom. We have to see the difference here between *physical salvation and deliverance* and *spiritual salvation and deliverance*. We saw in verses 6-8 that he knew God would allow him to die in martyrdom, and that it would be very soon. He was already being "poured out." The process had already started. There would be no physical protection from that. He was very sure that would happen.

We could have gone to II Peter and seen that Peter felt the same way. Jesus Christ Himself had told him, there by the seashore, that he would die a martyr's death; and he knew that was coming up. So, like Peter, Paul knew it was going to happen; and there would be no physical protection from that. He would die. The sword would cut his head off. That is what happened with Paul, as far as tradition goes.

Yet Paul also knew that God would save him—**spiritually!** Eternally! Now, for a converted Christian, spiritual salvation is more "sure" than physical salvation. "By grace are you saved through faith." That is the salvation that we can be sure of, *if* we continue in this way. But our physical deliverance is not quite so sure, because we have to look at these other factors. God is very willing to have us in His Kingdom, and what we do now is merely a preparation for that greater time. That may seem like a hard-nosed way of looking at our physical lives, but we have to remember what we are, and what He is, and what is to come.

This, of course, brings up a very important point concerning perspective. A great deal of the rest of this sermon is going to be about **perspective**. That is something that we need to get our minds around. Our perspective is far different from God's. Remember He says, "My thoughts are higher than your thoughts." They are so high that it is like the stars compared to ground zero here. We do not think like He does.

There is also a difference between our way of looking at things and many of the converted people in the Bible's way of looking at things. They looked at life differently than we do. They lived in a different time, and had been brought up under a different system. So they just automatically thought differently than we do.

Carnal human beings, just in general, tend to be egocentric (meaning, "me." "I am the greatest." "Everything revolves around me." "If it doesn't happen to me, it doesn't happen."). There are some philosophers who believe that if you do not witness something, it never happens. It is a weird way of philosophy—our entire existence is created up in our own minds and around our own selves. But that is just the ultimate in egocentrism.

Usually a human being, without God's Spirit, tends to be totally absorbed in himself; and the limits of his universe do not reach much further than the end of his nose. And, I am sorry to say it, but this egocentrism has heightened (of all places in the world) in America. The reason for this is that we have an almost innate "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" mentality—where we think, "I can do it. I'm the center of the universe. I can forge my own destiny." And so we tend to be very self-centered people.

It has become even worse over the past several decades, because there has been such a push for individual rights. You can lump them all in there: women's rights, gay rights, civil rights, or whatever it happens to be. They are all pointed right back at the individual—in opposition to the larger community. So the normal man on the street in this country tends to be quite self-centered.

We tend to look at every situation according to **our** needs, **our** desires, **our** plans, **our** hopes, **our** dreams, and even **our** demands. Now we demand that we be able to own a house, have a microwave, own two cars. It is almost a *demand*—not the American dream. Everybody has a *right* to have these types of things. (I am exaggerating somewhat, but it is getting to the point where we feel that everybody is *owed* something, and that level of being *owed* keeps going up and up and up.)

Perhaps, depending upon how we were brought up, we might consider our closest loved ones' needs and desires in a certain situation, but that is usually as far as it goes. It is called **the empirical self**. We consider ourselves to be "me and my closest loved ones"—normally a wife and children. Beyond that, we do not really look to the ultimate good of anybody else. We are just looking for the best for "our own."

So it is very rare for a carnal human being to look beyond himself for the ultimate good

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of his friends, or his coworkers, or his community, or his church, or his city, or his state, or his nation, or the world, or all humanity. It just does not enter his mind, because he is not used to thinking that way. He is used to thinking in this very enclosed space, right around his own head. To coin a term, it is "a helmet viewpoint"; and whatever is in that "helmet" is important. Whatever is outside of that "helmet" does not make a hill of beans difference to him. It is all for "me."

Star Trek's Mr. Spock, (if you watch the TV show or the movies) is very famous for one thing. "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few." (Kirk was the other way around. "The needs of me outweigh the needs of everyone else.") But it is very true biblically. The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. The Bible's point of view is universal, worldwide, humanity-wide, community-wide, nation-wide, church-wide, and (in Israel's case) state-wide. The needs of the individual come very far down the list.

And so, in the Bible, people were brought up to think first of their people—not just their families. Normally they thought first of their families, yes. But then their tribes were also very important; and the whole nation of Israel was very important. If you put that into some of the things that you read in the Bible, you get a very good perspective of why people act the way that they do—and why so many were so willing to do what they do for their tribe, or for their nation. I want to show you one law that shows this fairly clearly. This is the law about a rebellious son.

Deuteronomy 21:18-19 "If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city."

Now, notice. This goes beyond the family immediately. It goes directly to the elders of the city, which includes all the rest of the city in this matter. So, right away, we are seeing that this went far beyond just the individual and far beyond his empirical self; but already it includes his entire community.

Deuteronomy 21:20-21 "And they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice, he is a glutton and a drunkard.' Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, [and here is the kicker] and all Israel shall hear and fear."

You have all the elders judging. Then you have all the men of the city coming out and actually enacting the sentence. Then it sounds like the situation is trumpeted to all corners of the nation, so that everyone in the whole nation will learn from the example of this one rebellious son. Do you see how they thought? One person could affect—for good or for ill—the entire nation. So they tried to teach their children that their actions had a more far-reaching effect than they may have thought.

You can also jot down Deuteronomy 13:6-11 because the same thing is said about someone who tries to teach you falsehood, or tries to lead you to another god. The same thing was to happen—stone them with stones. And all Israel was to *hear* and *fear* what would happen to people who taught something other than God's way of life and turned people to idolatry.

I was very glad that, in his sermonette, Bill Cherry brought up Achan. I was going to go to that, and that saves me a few minutes. But one man's sin affected the entire camp of Israel; and three dozen or more people died. I think it was 31 men, or something like that, that died in the original assault against Ai before they figured out just who had committed the sin; and then Achan and his clan died. Lots of people were affected by one man's sin. Very early in Israel's history, God put this in as a lesson—for them, and for us. We need to have a greater perspective than just inside our own "helmet." We need to remember that our actions go much farther.

This comes through, too, in the New Testament. This is a much more positive example, in Acts 2. This is just after the day of Pentecost, and Peter preaches his sermon.

Acts 2:40-45 But with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

Some have considered this to be an early form of communism, but that is really terribly inaccurate. What this really shows is the early church showing godly love in the form of taking care of others beside oneself. Is that not what we are supposed to be learning—outgoing concern for our fellow man? And so what they were doing here was

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that they were thinking beyond the end of their noses and giving whatever they had, so that the other members of the church might *have* like they did. So they shared whatever they had.

Of course, a little bit later we have Ananias and Sapphira—who kept back part of the price of their piece of property—as a bad example of this. And a good example of this was Barnabas, which we find just before the example of Ananias and Sapphira. He had done this same thing—but had given it all, and had served the church. So here we have a good example of the people in the early first century church realizing that their perspective had to be greater than just themselves. It has to go out to the entire church.

Their perspective, after they became converted, was "You first" rather than "Me first." That is why it is in here as an example for all of us. Immediately, they got it! They had this godly attitude of giving, and sharing, and thinking of the other person. And is it not amazing that, right in the midst of this account, it says that the apostles went around and did many wonders. Could that be a hint that is what needs to be done?—to have more sense of **a community** rather than as individuals within the church—because, remember, we are one Body. That is, one Body of Jesus Christ. And we have a symbiotic relationship—not only with Jesus Christ, but also with each other. They were showing the fruits of this.

They were showing their connectedness, and the apostles did many signs and wonders. But we have gotten away from that in our modern times, because we are so "disconnected" and "individualized." That is just something to think about. But part of growth, then, in godly character is putting *off* this ***inward perspective*** and putting *on* an ***outward perspective***. That is, showing love for one another, giving, sharing, doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. There are many ways that we could say it.

And, of course, at the top of that list of considering others needs and desires is God. He is the first one that we must consider when we do anything. What does He want me to do? What would do His work, or His church, or His people, or this particular child of His the best—before we consider our own desires and needs in whatever it is that we are thinking of doing. Believe me, I do not do this anywhere near to the level that I should. I have been in the church all my life. I have been baptized since 1984. That should have been plenty of time for me to learn this—17 years or so. But it is just one of those things—it is human nature that we always think of ourselves first.

But I think that once we begin to practice this, and begin turning that around, then we will begin to have a much better and more understanding of why sometimes God protects us and heals us—and why, at other times, He does not. We will be beginning to

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put on the mind of Christ, and we will see things from His perspective. We will be able to see things much more clearly.

Now, my conclusion to this sermon is half a page long in my notes; so we are going to go very fast. I want to finish this sermon on a much more uplifting note than I have done so far. So we are going to take a look at some of **the promises of God** to *protect* and *heal* us. We can claim these promises and be certain that God has heard us. We can also be certain that He will consider our request seriously. And if our faith is really and truly in Him, and in His ability to decide what is right for us—you know, "all things work together for good to those who love God and are the called according to His purpose"—then we can accept His decision, whether it is thumbs up or thumbs down.

That is where our faith comes in. We know that He has made the promise, and that He is very willing to follow through on it—to answer it, to fulfill it. But we also have to remember that we need to look at this **from His perspective**. So, if we have that perspective, we will be more than willing to accept His decision on the matter.

Let us begin in Exodus 15. This one is particularly about healing, but it also has overtones of protection in it as well. This is just before He provides them with manna. This is where He provides them with water.

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. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it is 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. There He made a statute and an ordinance for them, and there He tested them, and said, "If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, and 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."

That is a very clear promise of healing and of protection from those diseases. But notice the conditional "if . . . then" construction of this promise. We have to heed Him, it says—meaning listen and obey Him. And we have to do what is right—meaning we have to live righteously.

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I see this covering two vital areas of life. The first one is ***following what He has prescribed in terms of law***. He has given us certain laws, and commandments, and statutes; and those tell us how to conduct ourselves. But I think the other language in here has to do with ***applying His overall way of life***. The Jews were very good at keeping the laws as prescribed in minute form; but they were very awful—terrible—in applying the principles of those laws in situations as they came up. And I think what God is doing by His wording here is saying, "Okay, I want you not only to keep My commandments; but I want you also to apply My way of life in areas that I haven't necessarily talked about specifically. Don't just be a nitpicker on the law, but also apply this more broadly in your general life."

So I see those two areas here. God wants us to be more than just *law keepers*. He wants us to be *principle applicers* as well. He wants us to be able to make the decisions in our own mind (about what is right and wrong) according to what He has already given us. That is, in areas that He has not necessarily spoken about specifically.

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.

Healing is listed first in a couplet with forgiving sin. So healing and the forgiveness of sin are connected. That means it is pretty important to God. He takes our healing seriously. He takes our request for healing seriously. It is almost as if He takes our request for healing as seriously as He takes our request for forgiveness, because [in this verse] they come right after each other.

Sin is often the cause of disease, but it is not *always* the cause of disease. We see in John 9 that there was no sin in that case. It was done for God's glory. But very often disease does come because there was some foul up in the past in the way that one lived. And sometimes it is not from your foul up, but it is from somebody else's foul up. God says that the iniquities are visited down to the 3rd and 4th generations. So it might be something that is your parents, or your grandparents, or whatever, did that gave you a somewhat degenerate body for whatever reason; and you are paying the price. It just simply may be genetics.

I do not want to get into all the philosophy of this, because it can get quite in depth; but I do want to say that the process of getting rid of disease is very similar to the process of getting rid of sin. There is *repentance*. There is *forgiveness*. And there is *living righteously* after that. And we cannot forget (as it says in Isaiah 53:5 and I Peter 2:24)

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that it is by Christ's stripes that we are healed. (In I Peter it says, "we were healed." It puts it in the past tense.) So obviously what Christ went through there at Calvary had something very specific to do with our healing. That is why healing and forgiveness of sin are so tied together. The same sacrifice covers it.

So, if you believe that God forgives your sins (and *all* your sins), what is stopping you from believing that He will heal all your diseases? It says so right here, in Psalm 103:3. That is just something to think about.

Deuteronomy 23:14 For the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you: therefore your camp shall be holy.

My dad read this verse just last week. He did not go into this part, but I will. He went into the holiness aspect. I will go into the part where it says why He walks in the midst of our camp. "To deliver you," it says, "and give your enemies over to you." His primary purpose for walking among us (at least, in this particular scripture) is to protect us, to preserve us, and to defeat—it is literally, "surrender over to us"—our enemies.

That is why He is there. He is there, all about us. And for us as Christians, He is **in us**—is He not? It is not just that He walks among us, but He is in us. And so it is that close—our deliverance, our protection, our preservation. We need to remember that.

Let us look at Psalm 91. This may be a psalm of Moses, as it comes right after Psalms 90 and it is quite similar. We have often thought of this as a psalm of the place of safety.

Psalm 91:1-6 He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust." Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.

So here, in just 6 verses, He promises protection from deception (or, deceptive attacks—the fowler), from pestilence, from terror (terror that comes by night), war, and destruction (just generally). That is a pretty broad ***promise of protection***. And it says

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that He does this as long as we dwell in the secret place of the Almighty. I looked this up. Like I said, the psalm has commonly been applied to the place of safety; and I think it can be. But I personally think that it has a wider application to us—at any time.

This "secret place of the Most High" is a basic word meaning a *shelter* or a *refuge*. It may refer to the Holy of Holies, which is interesting because the indication is **where God dwells**. The secret place of God is where God lives; and if you dwell with Him, you are going to be safe. So I think its application to us as Christians is much more general in the one sense—because we now have access to His throne. We can go directly into the Holy of Holies, at any time, by Jesus Christ (Hebrews 6:19-20). We have a sure anchor there, right next to God on His throne; and we have access to God any time that we want it. We can "fly" there at any time of trouble.

It is open to us. It was not open to the Israelites, because they had all those barriers between them and God's Holy of Holies—where God sat on His throne. But we have direct access now. We can jump right in there and be covered by God's wings, as it were. So it is very encouraging. Matthew 28:19-20 simply says to go out, do your work. This is the instruction, or the commission, to the disciples. And He says, "I will be with you always, even to the end of the age." Of course, Hebrews 13:5 says that He will never leave you nor forsake you.

Those are pretty strong promises—to have the very God Himself with us all the time. You might want to jot down I John 4:12-18 as well; because this shows that, if we have the love of God, and we are *showing the love of God to our brethren*, then God is in us. That is *proof* that God is **in us**. We need not fear then—because perfect love casts out fear, and there is no torment with that. We do not need to fear, because we know that, in God's love, He will do whatever it is that is best for us.

So, let us finish, then, in Psalm 145. I am just going to read this and then close. I will not make any comment. I think it is self-explanatory.

Psalm 145:14-21 The LOORD 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 LOORD is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works. The LOORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. [It is interesting that that was added.] He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them. The LOORD preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy. My mouth shall speak the praise of the LOORD, and all flesh shall bless His holy name forever and ever.