

28 October 2018

Mark 10: 52 (Patterson) “On your way, said Jesus. “Your faith has saved and healed you.”

A CHRISTIAN HEALTH TRIFECTA:

PHYSICAL RELATIONAL SPIRITUAL

INTRODUCTION: We humans seem to be obsessed with health. We certainly must like reading about the subject since a quick Google search produced 2,750,000 books about health. If you are still thirsty for health knowledge after breezing through those books you can start on the 3,260,000 articles on health that have been listed by Google. Or, if that reading list would interfere too much with football watching, you can read the ten words that Mark quotes of Jesus. “On your way; Your faith has saved and healed you.”

Those words of Jesus do not constitute an appeal to forego modern medicine and become a snake handling faith healer. The only snake handling that I have done is in a shoe store trying on boots that I couldn't afford. I fully subscribe to Emily Dickinson's observation that: Faith is a fine invention, for gentlemen who see; But microscopes are prudent, in an emergency!" Science is God's gift to us to help us explore the physical world. Faith is God's gift to humankind to let us see things spiritual and to experience the wholeness of life.

Your faith has saved you: Jesus said to the newly healed blind man. The usual religious context is that faith saves us from the consequences of our own sins. But faith does more than just save us from hell fire and damnation (whatever your conception of that may be.) Faith saves us from going through life as cynical beings. I feel compassion for people, who on hearing about some new violence, act of greed, or outpouring of hate say “well, that's just human nature.” No, it isn't. It is a perversion of human nature. Jesus clearly recognizes the existence of evil, but He just as clearly says, in many different ways, that Love is the basis of humankind. So, the next time you hear of someone helping someone, of aid being given to survivors of a natural disaster, or governments enacting legislation to protect the weak, say: well, that is just human nature, people loving people.

In the same sentence, Jesus also said that “your faith has healed you.” That brings up a question that we don't often pay attention to: Just what is Christian health? Perhaps it would be more accurate to say “what is the Christian perspective on health?” There are several elements to health that we will consider, and first is the most obvious:

Physical health: There is a wonderful little book published thirty years ago, titled *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. We know that the God of the New Testament is a loving God who does not deliberately inflict harm on Her children. However, when harm does befall a person, God may well use that disaster as a learning and spiritual development opportunity. I don't mean to be Pollyannaish about this. Pain is pain and there is frequently little ennobling blessing flowing from it. We do know, that faith and belief help people to physically respond better to treatment and to be more psychologically at ease when the prognosis is poor. Faith helps, but so does good medicine, good diet and good exercise! We all want to be healthy, but we frequently neglect both our faith and our personal discipline that impacts our physical health.

There is another kind of health that faith impacts which I will call **relational health**. How healthy is our relationship to the spiritual world, to God? In a prayerful way do we have a loving relationship with God or is it tainted by old fears and superstitions. Are we able to extend our relationship with God to our Church? Have we truly progressed to the point of being able to say that “we love our neighbors as ourselves”?

Relational health is also about our spouses, significant others, and children. Sometimes we take for granted those who are closest to us. Just because families are geographically close doesn't mean that they are psychologically close. Do we devote quality time to enriching those basic personal relationships? We know that faith plays an important role in our physical health, just think what an important role it plays in relational health. Is church just one more social organization to which we belong? We know that it should be the center piece of a community of believers. It takes faith, active faith, to turn an organization into a community.

This brings us to the third kind of health: **Spiritual health**. Broken bodies and broken relationships may not mend and we will still survive; but if our spirit is crushed, we are indeed dead, even if still breathing. We measure spiritual health by how much we enter into God's love and in how much we love ourselves. I don't mean the kind of narcissistic self-centeredness that we see all too often in public life, but the kind of self-assurance that says, “I am basically good, even with my flaws, and I have enough love about me to share with others.” It is a spirit that overcomes the worse physical problems and heals relationships. As Jesus noted, that is the kind of faith-based spirit that allows us to see, to overcome our blindness and to really see.

And, when we really see, we are then able to understand Jesus command to the just healed blind person, **Go! On your way!** Jesus wasn't irritated with the beggar and wanted him gone; Jesus was commanding him to show the rest of the community the fruits of his faith. So, He still does with us. We who have been blessed with faith have a responsibility to show our faith to all through our quiet good works.

As Vernon Watkins said some years ago in a little poem:

The pattern of time runs out,

And then I correct its pace.

I give the weight of thought

To all that my hand would trace.

But what, at last, have I wrought?

Nothing, except by grace.

Amen

