

Title:      **SICKNESS**

Text:      John 11:1-7

Date:      Tuesday Evening — April 12, 2011

Tape #      AA-14

Reading: *Lindsay Campbell and Rex Bartley*

Introduction:

Our first call this morning was from Bro. Skip Gladfelter. Sandy was in the doctor's office. She apparently has a hernia and will have to have surgery soon.

Early this afternoon, I got a call from Bro. Mark Henson, informing me of Regina's heart failure last night, asking that we pray for her, for him, and for her doctors. When I hung up the telephone, I fell on my face before our God, crying, "Blessed Father, another of your dear children is sick. Help me to help these dear friends." As I did, I thought immediately of the many in our assembly who are going through times of sickness and you who have passed through such just recently.

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|--------------------|-------------|
| • Joyce Montgomery | Bill Rolley |
| • Oscar Bailey     | Joe Blakely |
| • Bobbie Estes     | Bob Poncer  |

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- Charlotte's Sister      Bro. Dave Collier
- Bro. Bill Eldridge      Dana Tuttle

Thinking about these things, I pushed aside the things I had been studying and opened my Bible again to the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel, and read that very sweet story of the blessed family at Bethany, the instructive story of Lazarus, his sickness, his death, and his resurrection. If the Lord will enable me, I want to talk to you tonight about **SICKNESS**.

(John 11:1-7) “Now a certain [man] was sick, [named] Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 (It was [that] Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) 3 Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. 4 When Jesus heard [that], he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. 5 Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. 6 When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days

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still in the same place where he was. 7 Then after that saith he to [his] disciples, Let us go into Judaea again.”

## SICKNESS AND FAITH

Those who are dearly loved of God frequently suffer sickness and disease. Realizing this fact, it is important for us to understand something about God's purpose in the sickness of His children. And it is important for us to prepare ourselves to glorify our God when sickness comes upon us and those we love. It is my desire, in preaching this message, that the Lord our God will enable me to help you and others of His suffering children to glorify Him.

Yes, true believers often suffer from sickness and disease in this world. Sickness does not imply a lack of faith, or a lack of nearness to and communion with God. Sickness is not a sign of God's displeasure or a lack of faith on our part. Eventually, all God's saints get sick and die.

- Job
- David

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- Hezekiah

The fact is sickness is sent to us by our heavenly Father for our benefit. That which is aggravating to our bodies is often good for our souls. Sickness tends to draw our affections away from the world to Christ. Sickness sends us to our knees, sends us to our Bibles, and sends us to our Savior. Anything that accomplishes these things is good!

Sickness reminds us that life in this world, at its best, is but a vapor that is soon gone. Sickness forces us to look to the grave, look past the grave to judgment, and look past the judgment to eternity. Whenever sickness comes, be it nothing more than a cold or something as serious as cancer, let us be patient before the Lord, ever mindful of the fact that...

- Sickness is the fruit of sin.
- Sickness is the forerunner of death.
- Sickness and health, life and death are alike in the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- For believers, sickness is never unto death.

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**Illustration:** Richard Baxter — “*Almost well!*”

- And our sicknesses, whatever they are, are for the glory of God.

## THE BETHANY FAMILY

You are familiar with Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus.

- These three people trusted the Lord Jesus.
- They loved the Savior.
- They lived by faith.
- They earnestly sought the will, the honor, and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- They were all saved people.
- They saw the glory of God in Christ.
- They were among the very few in that day who worshipped Christ as God, their Savior and King.
- And the Lord loved them. John says, — “*Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus*” (v. 5).

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But Lazarus was now very, very sick. Martha and Mary knew that the Lord loved them and their brother. And they knew that the Lord could heal Lazarus if He would. So they sent a message to the Lord Jesus saying, — “*He whom thou lovest is sick.*” Blessed are those who can follow this example of simple, confident faith.

### LOVED, BUT SICK

The Lord loved Lazarus; yet Lazarus was sick. It is evident, then, that sickness is not a sign of God’s anger or displeasure. In their time of need, Martha and Mary turned to the Lord in simple, confident, submissive faith. They simply informed the Lord of their trouble. They did not ask for anything, much less demand anything from Him. They simply told Him of their heart’s burden. They were resigned to the Lord’s will and submissive to His purpose.

Knowing Christ’s love and power, they knew that He would do that which was best. And Martha and Mary fixed their confidence on the Lord Himself. They did not say, — “He whom we love,” — or,

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“He who loves and serves Thee,” — or even, “He who has great faith in Thee.” They simply said, “**HE WHOM THOU LOVEST IS SICK.**”

You know how the story turned out. The love, grace, and power of Christ were greatly displayed. The faith of Martha and Mary was strengthened, and many were converted. In it all, God was greatly glorified.

With these things in mind, I want you to consider four very basic, practical questions about this matter of sickness among God’s people.

### **1. WHY DOES SICKNESS COME?**

How do you answer your little child’s question, “Daddy, why do people get sick and die”? The Word of God alone can give a reasonable and satisfactory answer. **Sickness, disease, pain, and death are the results of human sin** (Romans 5:12). One great proof of original sin is the fact that even babies and little children get sick and die. If there were no sin, there would be no sickness and no death. Still, a

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question arises: — Why do those whose sins are forgiven, those who are loved of God get sick?

Of this much I am sure — **God could prevent it.** Pay no attention to those who tell you that it is not God's will for His People to suffer or become sick. If such were not God's will, it wouldn't happen. When sickness comes, it comes by the hand of God according to His own will and purpose. And if our sickness comes from God, there is a good purpose behind it (Romans 8:28).

Mark this down and remember it: — Often, very often, those who are loved of God are afflicted with sickness, disease, and that which causes them weakness and pain..

“Those whom the Christ loves are no more exempt from earthly trouble and anguish than others; rather they are bound over to it more surely” (Trench).

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Job, David, Hezekiah, Paul, and Epaphroditus were all faithful and beloved servants of God; and they all suffered painful and protracted sickness.

**Yes, our God, our heavenly Father has a good purpose in bringing His children down upon a bed of sickness.** A loving Father's hand will never cause His child a needless tear.

“I venture to say that the greatest earthly blessing that God can give to any of us is health, with the exception of sickness. Sickness has frequently been of more use to God’s saints than health has.” — **C. H. Spurgeon**

- By this means He will try and prove the sincerity of your love and faith.
- Sickness has a way of humbling and mellowing our hearts, teaching us patience, and increasing our faith.
- Sickness, when sanctified to our hearts, reminds us of the vanity of this world, the brevity of life in this world, and the helplessness of man.

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- Through pain and sickness Christ will often become more precious to His people.
- And sometimes God makes one of His children sick for the good of another. — Mary and Martha needed to learn something that could only be taught by the sickness and death of their beloved brother.

**Matthew Henry** wrote, “Sometimes Christ sees that we need the sickness for the good of our souls more than the healing for the ease of our bodies.”

**Richard Sibbes** said, “The time of sickness is a time of purging from that defilement we gathered in our health...That is a good sickness which tends to the health of the soul.”

Whatever His purpose may be, our hearts rest in this assurance: — **The sickness of God's children is “for the glory of God.”**

(John 11:4) “When Jesus heard *that*, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory

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of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.”

### **2. WHAT COMFORT DO GOD'S CHILDREN HAVE IN THEIR TIMES OF SICKNESS?**

It is a great comfort to have loving friends who manifest their love and care in so many ways. True, loving friends are a great blessing from the Lord. But we have a greater source of comfort than the best of friends can provide.

We are comforted by the fact that **our Lord Himself has been there** (Matthew 8:17).

(Matthew 8:14-17) “And when Jesus was come into Peter’s house, he saw his wife’s mother laid, and sick of a fever. (15) And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them. (16) When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with *his* word, and healed all that were sick: (17) That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by

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Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare *our* sicknesses.”

Our blessed Lord will never call upon you my brother, or you my sister, or me to walk any path that He has not already walked. Since He has felt the very pain we endure, be assured that He sympathizes with us in every painful thing He brings upon us. We have a sympathizing High Priest in heaven who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

(Hebrews 4:11-16) “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. (12) For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (13) Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. (14) Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us

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hold fast *our* profession. (15) For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. (16) Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

He is able both to comfort and to help. — “*For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.*” (Hebrews 2:18)

Our Lord Jesus has also assured us of His presence in the midst of our deepest distress.

Illustration: “*It is I; be not afraid.*”

His word is...

(Isaiah 43:1-4) “But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called *thee* by thy name; thou *art*

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mine. (2) When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. (3) For I *am* the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt *for* thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. (4) Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.”

**In the midst of your sickness, the Lord Himself will be a nurse to help you and make your bed comfortable** (Psalm 41:3).

(Psalms 41:3) “The LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.”

And we have this comfort, too — **our sickness is not unto death.** Like Lazarus, we who believe shall never die. **Those who have already died cannot die**

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again! We are a resurrected people who cannot die!

(John 11:25-26) “Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: (26) And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”

These bodies may die; but, like Lazarus, we will live again.

### 3. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SICKNESS TO GOD'S BELIEVING PEOPLE?

4.

I've already touched on this. So I will say little here. Let me just share with you some of those benefits I have gained from my own experience with sickness. I've never known much, but the Lord has allowed me to experience a little sickness. And I'm sure that one reason He has done so has been that I might learn by experience that which He would have me to teach you.

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- **Sickness causes us to pray.** Regrettably, we do not do much praying until we have need.
- **By sickness I am made to see the vanity of all earthly things.** None of those things for which men labor so hard are of any real value. Houses, lands, fame, financial security, and great learning will afford no comfort to a sick and dying man.
- **By sickness I am made aware that sooner or later every earthly tie must be broken.** Do not hold to anything too tightly. Soon you will have to let go.
- **By sickness I am made to see the brevity of time.** My days are numbered. The night will soon come when no more work can be done. If I am to do anything for the furtherance of the Gospel, for the kingdom of Christ, or for the glory of God, it must be done now.
- **By sickness I am made more sympathetic toward my suffering brethren** (Galatians 6:2; Matthew 25:36, 40).

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(Galatians 6:2) “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

(Matthew 25:36) “Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.”

(Matthew 25:40) “And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.”

- **And by sickness I am reminded that Christ is all.** Truly, He is all my Hope; He is all my Acceptance before God; He is all my Strength; He is all my Righteousness; He is all my Life; He is all my Desire (Psalm 73:25-26).

(Psalms 73:25-26) “Whom have I in heaven *but thee?* and *there is* none upon earth *that* I desire beside thee. (26) My flesh and my heart faileth: *but God is* the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.”

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### **5. WHAT ARE WE TO LEARN FROM THESE THINGS?**

Child of God, learn to take your cares to the Lord. Cast all your care upon Him. He does care for you. Learn to submit to the hand of God's providence, leaving your cares to the wisdom and goodness of God. — “*Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.*” Do not hold anyone here too dear. — Lazarus died (v. 14).

If God calls your dearest loved ones home, do not try to hold them, and do not murmur. The Lord desires to have them, and that is best (John 17:24).

(John 17:24) “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.”

We must all learn to live in the immediate prospect of eternity.

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And learn this: — **Our days of sickness, sorrow, and pain will soon be over.** If we die in faith, it will be a happy, welcome death (2 Corinthians 5:1, 6).

(2 Corinthians 5:1-9) “For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2) For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: (3) If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. (4) For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. (5) Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing *is* God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. (6) Therefore *we are* always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (7) (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) (8) We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (9) Wherefore we

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labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.”

**If we live until Christ comes, we will rejoice. He is coming to take us to a home that knows no sickness, nor pain, nor death** (Revelation 21:4).

(Revelation 21:4) “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

Child of God, seek to honor Christ in your times of sickness. He is honored by the faith, patience, submission, and love of His suffering children. Walk by faith in His fellowship and communion while you are in health; and when you are sick, it will not be lacking.

Amen.