

The problem of illness

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- [0 : 0 0] comes from the second abysmal of Paul to Timothy, chapter 4, and reading from verse 16.
2 Timothy 4, 16 to the end.
1 Timothy 4, 16 to the end.
1 Timothy 4, 16 to the end.
1 Timothy 5, 16 to the end. Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers.
The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you. Amen. May God bless that to us reading, and may it be to praise and glory. Sing again.
- [1 : 3 9] I turn your attention this morning. We're dealing with a series of problems in the Christian life, not problems generated by the Christian life, but ones that we have to deal with as Christians.
And the problem to look at this morning is the problem of illness. Trophimus, I left behind ill at Miletus.
Now, whatever you make of that statement, what is clear is that this illness cut across Trophimus' calling to carry out his ministry and prevented him doing it.
And in these verses that we read from 2 Timothy, Paul is conveying a number of greetings to Timothy, perhaps for the last time before he was executed in the Christian faith somewhere about AD 65.
And so he makes this comment, Trophimus, I left behind ill at Miletus. So first of all, I want you to think with me this morning about who Trophimus was.
- [3 : 0 0] The introduction of Trophimus. He's a traveling companion of Paul. And he first comes into the picture in Acts 20, verse 4.
Now, what's happening in that particular chapter is that Paul has decided to return to Jerusalem.
And he wants to return through Macedonia. And these people that I've just mentioned, they are his traveling companions.
So where did Trophimus come into this? Another clue is found to this in Acts 21, 29. For they had previously seen Trophimus, the Ephesian, with him, with Paul in the city.
And they suppose that Paul had brought them into the temple. So the clue that we're looking for is to be found in the word Ephesian. When you consider the ministry of Paul in Acts of the Apostles, his ministry in Ephesus is detailed in chapter 19.
- [4 : 3 7] And since Trophimus doesn't appear until chapter 20, it's not unreasonable to suppose that Trophimus was converted by the ministry of Paul in Ephesus.
Now, about that ministry, we read this. Acts 19, 8 to 10. He, that is, Paul, entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God.

But when some were stubborn and disbelieved, he withdrew from them, taking the disciples with him and argued daily in the hall of Tyrannus.

This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. So this ministry that Paul had in Ephesus was indeed an outstanding ministry.

It left its mark on everybody. Now, Acts 19 doesn't say what he said. But if you go to an earlier chapter, Acts 17, you get in a report of what Paul said in the synagogue at Thessalonica.

[5 : 56] And we read, So his message is about the cross.

His message is about the death of Jesus. His message is that the person, the prophecies of the Old Testament, all find their fulfillment in the person of Jesus, who God has indeed raised from the dead.

So we find then in verse 4, there's a reaction to this. Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas that the great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.

So this is the kind of response that Paul had in Thessalonica and also perhaps in the synagogue at Ephesus. So we find that what happened was, as a result of this Ephesian ministry, the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily.

And it was under this ministry that Trophimus was converted and became the traveling companion of Paul. But Trophimus was more than just a traveling companion.

[7 : 35] He had a ministry all of his own. Trophimus, I left behind ill at Miletus. And the clue to that ministry is first of all to be found in the word Miletus.

Miletus was an ancient city located in northwest Asia in the Anatolian province. From the Acts of the Apostles, it was a city that was visited by the Apostle Paul on his way to Jerusalem.

And it was from there that he summoned the elders of Ephesus and addressed them. So Miletus is important. It's a locality that is known to the Apostle.

So why is Trophimus there? Trophimus, I left behind ill in Miletus. We have to concentrate this morning on the verb left behind.

Because by that verb, we uncover a number of things. The verb does mean to leave behind. But it actually means more than that.

[8 : 55] It means to leave behind so that Trophimus could work in Miletus. If you want to be technical, it means to leave someone behind in a location with an authority which is delegated by God.

So in other words, Trophimus has become the pastor of the church in Miletus. But the fact is that this effective ministry which was conducted by Trophimus has been halted by this debilitating illness.

Now if we ask the question, what is it that Trophimus is called to do in Miletus? We find that the same verb and the same sort of sentiments are contained in the letter to Titus.

So this is what he says in Titus 1 and verse 5. This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

So that verse expands what was happening to Trophimus because the apostle's intention with both of them was exactly the same.

[10 : 26] He was being left there to exercise a pastoral ministry. And so far as Titus is concerned, he is required to put things in order that were lacking.

And the method he has chosen to do that is to ordain every elder, to ordain elders in every city in Crete. We can take it that Trophimus is also called to do the same thing.

Now these elders are not just anybody. The apostle gives the following qualification. If any man is blameless, the husband of one wife.

That particular statement was necessary because at this stage, because of Greek religion, some men had more than one wife. The husband of one wife and his children are believers and not open to the charge of being profligate or insubordinate.

But there are spiritual qualifications as well. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be blameless. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of goodness, a master of himself, upright, holy, and self-controlled.

[11 : 57] These are the people who are to exercise the ministry in Crete and in Miletus. But then he goes on and he says a bit more.

The elder must hold firm to the sure word as taught so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and confute those who contradict it.

So this is the high standard of ministry that Trophimus is being called to exercise in Miletus, also Titus in Crete.

But the problem is there's an illness. Trophimus I left behind ill at Miletus.

Now here, it's not just the case that he's left him behind to exercise this ministry, but this debilitating illness has crowded in on what he wanted and was called to do.

[13 : 07] Now the verb that's used here is asthenial, which means to be sick or ill or weak. You find it in the New Testament some 33 times, 14 of which are in the Gospels by themselves.

It can refer to weakness, it can refer to sickness, but more particularly it can refer to any form of debilitating illness.

So when the apostle visits Trothimus in Miletus, he finds him to be severely ill. Now what is he going to do about it?

In the Acts of the Apostles, you find that the apostle was always praying for the sick with positive results. So you cannot conclude that Paul having visited Trothimus and finding him ill, he did not pray for him that his health should be restored.

In Acts 28, we find Paul in Malta and the leader of the community was a man called Publius and his father lay sick with fever and dysentery and Paul visited him and putting his hands on him healed him and when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured.

[14 : 49] So Paul's not a stranger to God moving in this way. He prays for the sick with positive results, but it didn't happen with Trophimus.

He was prevented from carrying out his God-given calling because of illness. That is what is being said here.

And it is the case that down the centuries since the apostle wrote these words, many of God's servants have been prevented from fulfilling their ministry because of illness.

So, in addressing this problem, what is the person meant to do when illness crowds you in and you find that you can't fulfill your calling as God would want you to?

In the epistle of James, he addresses this. He says this, chapter 5, verse 11, Behold, we call those happy who were steadfast.

[16 : 16] You have heard of the steadfastness of Job and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. Now, the problem with Job was that he had this terrible skin problem and this skin problem had been allowed by God.

but one of the things that you can say about Job is this, that through this severe testing he remained steadfast in faith.

Now, when you read some of the chapters in Job, you might not get the impression that that's the case, but that is how God judged it. God said he was steadfast in faith.

So, what is the servant of the Lord to do? Going back to James, in the very few verses, verses 3 and 4 of the first chapter, he says this, This is how we are meant to respond to it.

What about the pastor who becomes ill and is unable to fulfill his calling? What he is meant to do in such a situation, and it applies to every Christian, is that he is meant in prayer and by reading God's word to minister in prayer to the Lord himself.

[18 : 28] That is what's being said here. allowing the testing of your faith to produce that steadfastness, that determination, that fortitude, that through everything you'll carry on.

However, this is not the end of the matter, Paul's father, because I want to introduce you to another of Paul's traveling companions, and we meet him in the epistle to the Philippians, and his name is Epaphroditus.

Now, Epaphroditus had been sent by the community at Philippi to meet Paul in Rome, and to take with him a monetary gift.

Paul says this, I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker, and your apostle and minister to my need.

Now, the thing about Epaphroditus is that like Trophimus, he had been ill, but in his case, there was a different report.

[19 : 50] In verses 26 to 27 of Philippians 2, he has been longing for you all, and has been distressed, distressed, because you heard that he was ill.

Indeed, he was ill on the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not only on him, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow after sorrow.

So, here's a different outcome. Here's Epaphroditus, who's also been ill, quite severely, by all accounts, at the point of death.

And in this case, he wasn't able to fulfill his ministry, but in his case, and we're not told why, God stepped in and restored him to health, so he would carry on.

And Paul sent him back to the Philippians, so that he could carry on with his ministry. Now, what about Trophimus? We don't know if his health was ever restored.

[21 : 10] This side of heaven, we can never know that. But what we can do is we can accept these experiences as coming from God.

And if we do accept them as coming from God, we can prove God in them. It doesn't mean to say it's automatic, that you'll be restored to health, but it does mean that you'll be spiritually enriched.

And that is the point of all this. Writing to the Corinthians, in 2nd Corinthians chapter 1, Paul writes, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who comforts us in all our affliction.

Read 2nd Corinthians 11, and you will see what the apostle had to put up with. But through it all, he was victorious.

And as I mentioned last week in the context of an answered prayer, prayer, he had this thorn in the flesh, which I have deduced was partial blindness.

[22 : 31] Yet, through it all, he carried on. And he carried on and was successful because he accepted the challenge of illness as coming from God.

and if he accepts the challenge, he gets the resource to deal with it. And the resource was, my grace is sufficient.

Sufficient for today. Sufficient for tomorrow. and sufficient until you go and meet our Lord himself in the gates of the eternal kingdom.

Amen. In light, almighty and ever living God, we thank you for what your word has to say to us and how it's so real by addressing the issues that we have in everyday life.

And we thank you that you have promised that we will have grace sufficient for every day. And so we would open our hearts to the reception of that grace that we might prove you as the God who cares for us not only today, but always.

[24 : 13] In Jesus' name, Amen.