

黃澤群醫生給您的家書

Letters to you from Dr Johnson WONG

Dear Friends, Brothers & Sisters in the Lord,

This is a collection of ten articles published in the weekly bulletin, Heaven-ward Path, of the Huai En Tang Church, written by Elder Dr Johnson Wong in the period between late October 2014 when he was diagnosed with Stage Four lung cancer, and August 2016. In the final two years of his life, Elder Wong continued to proclaim a Christian's thanksgiving and praise towards God even under the threat of death and in the midst of pain and suffering. Elder Wong's heartfelt desires were written down like a letter, written to you and to me, imparting to us the love in his life, the everlasting love that is from God.

Chinese Christian Church Brisbane – Huai En Tang

31/10/2016

God will provide the best

Didn't expect to run into a classmate back from medical school who I hadn't seen in ages, coincidentally he was the specialist examining my chest x-ray. The gladness seeing an old classmate turned into a bolt out of the blue- I was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer!

Although from my profession I know roughly 12% of lung cancer cases are non-smokers, I've always felt my health was generally well, plus work and home don't have much pollution at all, and not even access to second-hand smoke; so when the doctor asked me to talk about the x-ray, I was expecting maybe pneumonia at worst.

Little did I expect the x-ray found a large shadow and pleural effusion (fluid build-up), further tests concluded the cancer cells had metastasized into the vertebrae. Death is not frightening to me, because I know I will be going to a more beautiful place; but when I think about the dreams I had wished to accomplish with my family, and that the paths ahead of Carol and my children will be long and difficult, as well as the heavy blow to my elderly mother- I need to return to the promise of the eternal God:

What father among you, if his son asks for (bread, will give him a stone; or if he asks for) a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! – (Luke 11:11-13)

Even our imperfect earthly fathers would not provide harm-stones, unclean serpents, and venomous scorpions- to their children, let alone our Heavenly Father! Therefore I am deeply convinced the cancer doesn't belong with the stones and the serpents and the scorpions, but is rather the plan of God over all things, behind which there must be good reasons.

Thank God! He has given me the Holy Spirit as my comforter. In the near future, when I face the long treatment process, even those closest to me and my brothers and sisters in Christ can't be with me always or experience my suffering; but the Spirit is constantly my help, He will accompany me in the valley of the shadow of death, and deliver me from evil.

As I shared at church camp, life is imperfect, there are many sufferings, but we can remain joyful throughout our many trials because we know the living God who loves us tasted all suffering for our sake. The Holy Spirit, who comforts us, is with us always, giving us comfort every step of the way. In the end, if my spirit grows and becomes whole, nothing is lost.

My family and I submit ourselves under God's sovereignty. No matter how long an earthly path I have remaining, I will glorify Christ, and live the hope that is found in God's love. We would also like our brothers and sisters to experience God's faithfulness with us, because God will provide the best.

In Christ, Elder Johnson Wong

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

My family has experienced a complete blow which we had never experienced before in these past few days. We couldn't believe Johnson's illness at first, but that was soon replaced by shock, anxiety, grief, and concern. The medical tests didn't give us hope, but rather disappointment over and over again. But we still choose to submit to God, and not question why this is happening, because God must have His will, even if it isn't apparent to us. We trust that He is faithful, as He said 'Your bars shall be iron and bronze, and as your days, so shall your strength be.' (Deuteronomy 33:25). Therefore we praise and thank God, and thank the support and comfort that our brothers and sisters have

shown us. With you beside us, we won't collapse, and we will fight and win this long and hard battle.

In Christ, Carol Wong

我的盼望是從祂而來

18/11/2014

My Hope Comes from Him

If one wanted to precisely describe how I felt after the operation, it would have to be “條氣唔順”, a lively and colourful Cantonese phrase which has a double meaning: superficially, it describes the feeling of “difficulty with breathing”, while its deeper meaning is “feeling upset”.

A normal adult breathes on average 10 to 12 times per minute, with the great majority of that happening involuntarily. Hence when I found myself sucking in air, trying to turn in bed, struggling to finish my third sentence as I ran out of breath, I realised how precious it is to be able to breathe involuntarily. Even if I tried taking a deep breath voluntarily, I had to give up most times simply due to the searing pain or spluttering cough.

However, what upset me most was the strong and yet inexplicable feeling of losing control. I am a person who loves to plan: 10 years outlook, a 5 year project, annual planning, quarterly targets, monthly reviews, weekly estimates, a daily planner....and I surely enjoy that feeling of being in total control when things work out exactly as planned.

I did not plan to have cancer, and I never contemplated that my time on earth would be possibly limited to 53 years. Lord, you promised that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.” (Rom. 8:28) I do not fully comprehend what is happening to me. Lord, please reveal Your will for I believe from the bottom of my heart

that all things will work together for good to those whom You love and to those who love You.

Christians are those who are called to take up their cross and follow Christ. What we are going to embark on is not a journey on a wide and comfortable path lined with roses. We are urged to be ready at all times for afflictions of our body, soul and spirit, to be attacked by our enemies and even betrayed by our friends, only because our Lord has gone through this all. When I was worrying about whether I could get pass 53, all of a sudden I remembered that my Lord died for me on the cross at age 33. There and then I realized that when God promises that all things work together for good, it does not necessarily mean that he is going to change the circumstances or take away suffering; instead, He is calling for us to trust Him wholeheartedly, no matter what the circumstances might be.

“Find rest, O my soul, in God alone, my hope comes from Him.” (Ps. 62:5) If my hope hinges only on external circumstances --- the disappearance of symptoms, effectiveness of treatment, regaining strength, going back to work --- then my mood will only fluctuate with changing circumstances. This is hope without peace; it is weak and untrustworthy. If the desired good result does not come to fruition, what is left will only be fear and disappointment.

God reminds me time and time again that hope does not originate from my or anyone’s ability to control the circumstances; rather, it is through total trust and obedience that everything is in God’s control. He promises to be with me always, and He will definitely make all things work together for good. Hope from God transcends circumstances; my hope did not and does not and will not change or sway yesterday, today or tomorrow, because it comes from Him, the faithful God who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

During creation God breathed into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life, and he became a living being; during the Pentecost the Holy Spirit came with a sound like the blowing of a violent wind. Right

now I am like a yacht under repair, finding rest in God alone, until the time when He breaths into me; I will surely set sail again then, going full steam ahead with the prevailing wind.

Johnson Wong

無言無語，也無聲音可聽

15/12/2014

No Speech and No Words, No Sound is Heard from Them

Tattoos are now widely accepted as part of popular art culture; however, they were once used in ancient China as a form of punishment to label convicts. Unalterable symbols or words (e.g. slave, robber) were tattooed on the faces of convicts to connote their extraordinary status. Among other cultures, such as the ancient Egyptians and the South Pacific Maoris, different forms of tattoos signify different social statuses; while during the 1970s and 1980s in Hong Kong, the “left arm green dragon & right arm white tiger” tattoo proclaimed the identity of the underworld.

In order to ensure the radiation beam reached the area for treatment accurately, technicians applied “positioning tattoos” to my chest, abdomen and pelvic area prior to the commencement of radiotherapy. At the beginning Carol assumed those were only temporary spots made by marker pen and she reminded me to remove the spots after finishing the course of treatment. Only after she realized that they were actually tattoos did she reluctantly accept the fact that I am now a life member of the “radiotherapy club”.

Lying on the narrow radiotherapy table, the only thing I could do was to remain dead still. The two technicians took turns to verbally confirm the position of the radiation beam, making use of the tattoos on my body. This was followed by a series of clicking sounds produced by oscillation of machinery. All of a sudden the light was switched off, the room was pitch-dark, the conversation faded, the machinery sound retreated, and I was enveloped in complete silence.

“The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of His hands. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.” (Psalm 19: 1,3) Although it might seem like complete silence, God’s wondrous work encases the universe and His wisdom circulates the world. A radiation beam, despite being unseen to the human eye, works quietly to eradicate the cancer cells in my bones, proclaiming as a witness the undeniable presence of God. The greater the grace and mercy, the less obvious it is felt by the recipient; often only after the cup of blessing overflows does it become appreciable.

Since the start of my illness, I have received countless condolences from all over the world (some I have never met and some I have lost contact for over twenty years) through all manner of media (letters, cards, emails, phone calls, Facebook, WhatsApp...), bearing words of blessing and encouragement and in particular promise and comfort from the Word of God (“Promises from God”, a daily email from Pastor Ron was a standout example), all unwittingly becoming the special medicine that healed my wound as well as the supply warehouse for my tough spiritual battle.

I have lost count the number of times when goodies have appeared at the front door; one time it was a flower arrangement, another time a food hamper, and another time books on anti-cancer recipes. One after another, families have brought in delicious homemade dishes or goods from the market. In order to cause minimal disturbance, they have carried out their actions of love with one thing in common - they come in a whisper and they leave in a whisper. They would usually send an SMS before arriving, put down their delivery and within three minutes, they would be gone amidst our words of gratitude.

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent. So he did not open his mouth.” (Isaiah 53: 5,7) Our Lord Jesus could

have opened his mouth to defend himself because He is the only sinless person in the history of mankind; however He chose to remain silent because He willingly submitted himself to His heavenly Father’s amazing plan of salvation.

The fact that we can reconcile with God which then allows us to reconcile with one another, and the fact that through the indwelling Holy Spirit we can truly love one another with our words and actions; that was all made possible because of the wounds and stains on Christ’s body. It was His sacrifice on the cross that gives us new life through his mercy and forgiveness. I pray to the Lord that as I continue to enjoy the warm and sincere love from my fellow brothers and sisters, I will not forget to look back at the nail marks on his hands - an unforgettable symbol, a mark of love and grace.

Johnson Wong

蒙福的人

27/01/2015

Blessed are Those

It is a Must-Do for most Chinese to seek blessings at the beginning of a year, be it through burning incense and divination, practicing “life release” and spinning the wheel of fortune, or taking vegetarian meals and giving glad tidings, just to name a few. Even for Chinese Christians, we greet each other with the phrase “Xin Nian Meng Fu” which literally means “to receive blessings in the New Year”. The question remains – what is the difference between the blessings we receive and those sought by the world? Is there any distinction between the two?

According to Chinese tradition, the Five Blessings are “longevity, wealth, health, love of virtue and a peaceful death”. At first glance, it appears common sense to seek the Five Blessings. However, even if you already have the first four blessings in the bag, to have a peaceful death - i.e., to pass away not because of any sickness or accident and without any regret or wants - is

easier said than done. Even supposing one manages to die peacefully, it would imply the first four blessings are about to disappear into thin air, no matter how big a fortune one has made in life; all is now rendered totally meaningless, not to mention the desolateness of not knowing where you go after death.

As to the assorted ways of seeking blessings, it all boils down to the acknowledgement that humans are limited in what we can do; that there is a supreme being up there, though most have no idea who He is, hence leading into the blind alley of “Man made God”. Although we know well that Confucius, General Guan Yu, and our “ancestors of 18 generations” are, without exception, just mere mortals, it seems there is no choice but to fantasize that they are gods, in order to enhance luck and avoid calamity. Regrettably, like a clay idol fording a river, he cannot guarantee his own safety, let alone others. Graven images made by mere mortals are in no way going to bring us blessings in any shape or form.

Since the beginning of my illness, most of the messages I have received are those of regret and sympathy. For a change, a spiritual mentor reminded me two weeks ago that I am chosen by God and blessed by Him. At first blush it is hard to fathom how someone diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer can be considered blessed. On second thought though, is it not true that many of those who are blessed by God in the Bible have gone through experiences generally considered unfortunate or painful? Mary found out she was pregnant before she was married, yet she proclaimed “For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed” (Lk.1:48) when she sang the Magnificat. Despite being hunted time and time again, King David was able to pen the verse “My heart is glad and my tongue rejoices, my body also will rest secure” (Ps.16:9)

Those who are blessed have all arrived to this unanimous spiritual wisdom – to receive the Five Blessings or even millions of blessings are nothing compared to receiving the provenience of blessings, God Himself! The angel went to Mary and said,

“The Lord is with you.” (Lk.1:28) David characterized God this way, “Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup.” (Ps.16:5) “Immanuel” (God is with us) is the upmost blessing a believer (and only a believer) can receive. Whether in the good times or the bad, no matter where and when, God has promised that He is with us always! The issue is that we often show indifference towards our unique status, so much so that we just take it for granted.

As to the way that believers receive blessings, the teachings of the Old and New Testament are diametrically opposite to that of the world, with the former challenging us “how to humble oneself and give more” while the latter emphasises on “how to elevate oneself and get more”. The bible teaches us that “Blessed are those who fear the Lord.” (Ps.112:1) & “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt.5:3) “Fear the Lord” & “Poor in spirit” are two of the same. They both require us to humble ourselves continually and emphasise our insufficiency, in order for us to carry out the commandments of God to love Him and to love others as yourself, to stay connected to the source of love always so that we can continually give more.

Serious illness (and other arduous life challenges) will help us to count our days more wisely. We are but morning dew, no one knows what is going to happen tomorrow (other than God); the Lord has died for me, how dare I not serve Him with my life. May we all seek first the kingdom of God so that we can receive His never ending blessings. Just as the refrain in the famous hymn Trust and Obey reflects: “Trust and obey, for there is no other way (to receive God’s blessing)”.

忍耐也當成功

03/03/2015

Let Perseverance Finish its Work

Perseverance is one of the flavours of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal.5:22). In the past I have always regarded myself as

someone “flavoured with a great deal of perseverance” until I fell ill last October. It was then when I realised that in order to nurture this spiritual quality to its full-bodied flavour, one cannot rely on innate character or biblical knowledge; it has to come from the courage to face your own limitations and the willingness to open up your deepest and darkest shortfalls in front of the Creator.

Four months could be a short or long period of time, during which there were numerous occasions of waiting and perseverance – ten days of waiting for the result of the cancer cell receptors (the laboratory in Melbourne is the only one in the country which offers this service), two weeks in hospital after the pleurodesis procedure (though a small operation, it carries a rating of STRONG for its postoperative pain), ten sessions of radiotherapy which took three weeks to finish (machine breakdown, public holidays, personnel change...), delay of PET scan appointment time and again (awaited replacement parts to arrive from Singapore, specialist went on holiday), not to mention the unrelenting side effects and the uncertain effective duration of the Target Therapy – I surely tasted what it means by “a stagger over the heart” and “losing three inches of face” for the two Chinese characters (忍耐), which are the equivalent of perseverance.

However, perseverance does not merely imply a “tough it out” mentality; it is more an attitude of hope and expectation. “The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains.” (James 5:7) The farmer patiently watches over his seemingly barren field because he firmly believes that each and every drop of blood and sweat will bring about a fruitful harvest. In the same way, we are able to persevere in difficult times because we absolutely believe that whatever our omniscient, omnipotent and loving God has installed for us, it is not only infallible but definitely the best for us. We quietly look up to God, firmly believing that the trials He allows us to face will bring about spiritual fruit in abundance.

The Bible gives the ensuing appraisal for those who are able to persevere – As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. (James 5:11) Job went through trials and tribulations including the total wipe out of his family and possessions as well as the infestation of his body with scabs and festers. However, his sufferings were never the purpose but rather a stage he had to go through, in pursuance of the blessed finale the Lord has in place for him. This does not only refer to the manifold grace and blessings he eventually received (Job 42:12) but also the desire and intent behind the trials that God permitted him to endure.

God desires for each and every person who faces adversity, including myself, to experience Job’s transformation from his initial grievance to his ultimate obedience. It is only when we keep our mouth shut that we are able to forsake our narrow-mindedness and turn and tune in to the will of God. Up to this moment, the main points I have picked up can be summarised as follows:

1. Genuine perseverance can only be acquired in time of trials and tribulations; the most unbearable circumstances are the very place to learn how to persevere.
2. God is merciful and faithful - He not only walks with me through the valley of the shadow of death, He has also sent a plethora of brothers and sisters who surround me with their palpable love and care.
3. I am prepared to learn more about perseverance in the days ahead because perseverance is essential to complete the “faith, hope and love” given to us by God. This is the outcome the Lord desires for all who belong to Him.

“Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:3-4) Despite getting through the test at the starting line (the PET

scan result was better than expected), I know well that this is a marathon; there is still a long way to go before I am able to finish the race and realise the blessings from above, it is vital to stay reliant on the safekeeping of God's mercy and the support of the prayers of the saints.

Johnson Wong

留住下一代

05/05/20105

Keeping Our Next Generation

If you were about to leave this world today, what is the one thing you would love to leave behind for your children? Is it a hefty inheritance, a fathomless knowledge, the skills to seek a livelihood, or a life of intimate relationship with God? This was almost the very first question I asked myself when I fell ill last year, and the search for an answer kept rolling on.

It was no coincidence that I came across a number of heart stabbing investigation reports of late. In Australia, only 10% of the population attends Sunday worship on a regular basis; among them the attrition rate was highest in the 15-29 age group, up to 30% in the last ten years alone. In the USA, among those aged 18-29 who have attended church meetings, half are never to be seen again. There are a wide range of reasons for them to leave the church but whatever the reason, it all takes root and sprouts during the early teens (age 11-15), only to bear fruit when they put thought into action, as they become relatively more independent in their high school or university years.

Among the many reasons for the young to “forsake” the church, two demand our full attention:

1. Teachings in churches are irrelevant, over-simplistic and didactic, unable to assist young people in making choices in their day to day life. “What would Jesus do about pre-marital sex or homosexuality?” “Evolution versus creation - how can we tell

which is right or wrong?”... .. Do we fall into the trap of just assuming that since our kids grow up in church, they will automatically turn into a spiritual person? Are we neglecting the need to equip our next generation to face the “anti-Christ” environment in university and society as a whole, so much so that despite their biblical knowledge, they are ill equipped with the wisdom to defend the Truth?

2. Parents are not putting enough effort in their God-given duty to foster the spiritual growth of our children. From the extreme end of absent fathers (parents) who devote their full energy in getting ahead in their workplace, rendering their children devoid of any role models; to the more common misuse of worldly values in educating our youth, putting emphasis on academic performance way above that of spiritual development. Are we merely praying for the Lord to “bless” our sons and daughters while desperately hoping that they will not be called upon to serve Him? Do we mistakenly push the full load of spiritual upbringing to our Youth Pastors or simply just give up, never to get involved in the equipping and prayers of our children's spiritual progress?

Give thanks to our Lord! Our church attaches great importance to the spiritual upbringing of our youth, and we have a rather comprehensive training program to match. This includes children's Sunday school, SALT fellowship for the high schoolers, and the numerous fellowship groups that meet the varying needs of the university students. While at the same time, married couple groups, adult fellowships and the Sunday pulpit put much emphasis on the teachings of parenthood, encouraging parents to get involved in the spiritual “capital construction project” of our next generation.

Without any doubt, home is the ultimate base for young people to cultivate stability and acceptance; it is also the cradle of all values and perceptions. As parents and in particular Christian parents, we are charged to teach our children according to the Word, “Start children off the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” (Proverbs 22:6) It is our

assignment to set our own lives up as examples in order to influence the lives of our children, for we are called to be stewards of God, and amidst the heritage for us to keep, none is more precious than our flesh and blood.

We ought to give the best to our children but not in our arbitrary ways, rather according to the will of God. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5) Let us continue to supplicate and encourage one another, to accomplish what we are entrusted with; that is to activate every fine quality embedded in our children, for “without exception, the handiwork of God is always top notch

Johnson Wong

主耶穌的醫治（一）：疾病的緣由和意義 12/10/2015

The Healing of Jesus Christ (1):

The Origin & Meaning of Illness

Over the years working as a doctor, apart from employing professional skills to try help my patients recover, I often spend time praying with them, asking for God’s merciful healing. It was however not until I took up the challenging fight against Monster Cancer that I found myself acutely lacking in biblical knowledge on this subject matter. Despite the assorted accounts of how patients came to ask for Jesus’ healing, I could not be half certain about the pertinent approach to ask for the Lord’s healing that would be both pleasing and acceptable to Him.

In actual fact, there are more than thirty records regarding the healing of Lord Jesus in the Gospels. Among them there are precious spiritual treasures ready to be discovered, be it the mindset of those who were seeking to be healed, the reaction of

the bystanders, or the manner in which our Lord healed and instructed. They contribute in particular plenty of practical and useful pointers to resolve the age old question – How to ask God in faith?

At the beginning of my illness, it was inevitable for me to ask myself as well as God, “Why me?” Upon calming down though, I was reminded that “there is no need to be afraid since the very hairs of my head are all numbered (by God)” (Luke 12:7). What interested me instead soon after was a relatively more objective desire to search the Scriptures for the origin and meaning of illness.

Going through both Testaments, it becomes apparent that illness and death were in no way what God had installed for humans during creation – for “God saw all that He had made, and it was perfect.” (Genesis 1:31). They were rather the by-products of the curse as a result of Adam & Eve’s rebellion against God. They were banished from the Garden of Eden, having to toil painfully against the thorns and thistles just to scramble for enough food. This was followed by the mauling of the Flood and the enforced scattering from the Tower of Babel, resulting in the dramatic drop of average life expectancy from the nine hundreds in the first ten generations to just over three hundred in the second ten generations; and since the time of Moses, despite the leapfrog in the medical science of today, a hundred plus has become the absolute ceiling of advanced age.

Apart from the inevitable deterioration of our bodily physiology and ecological environment due to the Original Sin, humans also tend to forget the golden rule that “our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit”. We not only fail to follow God’s will to treat our body with tender loving care but we choose to go our own way – unbalanced diet, sedentary lifestyle and late nights with insomnia are some examples on the lighter end of the scale while substance abuse, uncontrolled eating plus anxiety and depression are some on the more serious end. Despite them being considered as near normal using today’s standards, such

behaviour & practices are indeed against the law of God, sure to evolve into triggers of ill health in the future.

The connection between sin and illness can be at times even more direct -- in the Old Testament the Egyptians were attacked by boils because of Pharaoh's steadfast refusal to obey God (Exodus 9:8- 12); King Uzziah contracted leprosy due to his pride and unfaithfulness (Chronicles 26:16-20); while in the New Testament the Leper (Matthew 8:1-4) and the paralysed man (Matthew 9:1-8) were both completely healed once their sins were forgiven by the Lord.

Nevertheless, not all illnesses are caused by sinning. Just as the Lord Jesus commented on the man who was born blind, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." (John 9:3) God allowed Satan to attack him with illness so that when he was healed, people would know that Jesus was the Son of God. (John 9:33)

Similarly, through illness God tested His children such as Job in the Old Testament, so that his faith would come forth as gold (Job 23:10); as for Paul in the New Testament, although the "thorn in his flesh" was never healed, likewise his faith moved up a notch, granting him the understanding that "God's grace is sufficient for me, for His power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Indeed, the attack of cancer cells and the side effects of treatment are not easy to bear. Nonetheless, the experiences of the past year have enabled me to appreciate the deeper meaning of faith, to learn how to grapple with "admit & repent" and "trust & obey" as the stepping stones into a life of faith. Just as King David, who on the one hand had no doubt that God would restore him from his bed of illness (Psalm 41:3), on the other hand did not forget to call upon God and repent - "Have mercy on me, Lord; heal me, for I have sinned against you." (Psalm 41:4). This will also be the theme of Part 2 of "The

healing of Jesus Christ" – the proper mindset for seeking healing. In Christ,

Johnson Wong

主耶穌的醫治（二）：求醫者的正確心態 03/11/2015

The healing of Jesus Christ (2):

The Correct Attitude of Those Who Seek Healing

In Part 1 we learned that those who came to Jesus seeking healing kept turning up with a plethora of medical conditions - blindness, epilepsy, paralysis, leprosy, haemorrhage - a situation on par with modern day hospital emergency and outpatient departments. Despite the challenge, without exception they were all healed one way or another. Does this imply the existence of a common and correct attitude of those who seek healing?

Then Jesus said to her (woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years): Daughter, your faith has healed you. (Luke 8:48) Then Jesus touched their (the blind's) eyes: According to your faith let it be done to you. (Matthew 9:29) Jesus said to him (Bartimaeus): Go, your faith has healed you. (Mark 10:52)

There is no doubt that the Lord Jesus affirmed that "those who seek healing need to have faith". The problem lies in our tendency to distort and exaggerate God's Word, hence the advent of dubious teachings such as "you will definitely be healed as long as you have faith" or "if you are not healed it is because you do not have enough faith". Too often we put "faith of man" on a pedestal, postulating it to be the silver bullet that will ameliorate all illnesses in the blink of an eye. In fact, many of Jesus' healings had nothing to do with whether those who were healed had faith or not. The man with the withered hand in the synagogue (Mk 3:1-7), the man with the

abnormal swelling (Lk 14:1-4) and the invalid at the pool of Bethesda (Jn 5:2-15) had no intention to seek healing from the Lord, let alone come with faith; yet they were all healed. Spiritual giants such as the Apostle Paul pleaded in vain with the Lord three times to take away the thorn from his flesh (2 Cor 12:8) - are we then to label him as someone who has "insufficient faith"?!

In order to avoid the needless compunction and blame game (towards others and God) brought about by incorrect teaching such as "with faith you must be healed, no healing implies insufficient faith", it is imperative to clarify what 'faith' means. Faith is clearly not something that exists on its own, nor is it a kind of energy possessed by humans that can be turned up during difficult times to "move the hand of God" so as to save the day.

The Bible has time and again reminded us that faith is an enduring state of mind that is ready to set us into action. It is only when we are repeatedly touched by God's profound saving grace, fully comprehending the perfect character of the Triune God while at the same time recognising our own sinful nature, before faith truly germinates and grows in our spirit, producing flowers and bearing fruit along the way.

The life of Moses can be divided into three stages: at the palace "I can" (Exodus 2:1-15), in the wilderness "I cannot" (Exodus 2:16-5:23) and during exodus "God can" (Exodus 6:1-14:31). It took a full eighty years of honing to readjust his attitude before he was entrusted by God with the crucial responsibility of leading the Israelites out of Egypt.

John the Baptist was handpicked by God to spread the news of the Heavenly Kingdom in the wilderness and many came to receive his baptism. Yet he declared: He (Jesus) must become greater and I must become less (John 3:30). Hence it never bothered him when his disciples decided to follow Jesus (John 3:26-27), and for the sake of his Lord, John was prepared to

have himself decapitated (Mark 6:27).

In the same token, the two blind men firmly believed that Lord Jesus would heal them because they possessed the insight that "they cannot" but "God can". Hence they cried out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" (Matthew 9:27). The man with leprosy came to Jesus and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." (Mark 1:40) – this leper was fully aware of his own sin and had the utmost respect for God's absolute authority to decide whether he was to be healed or not.

While writing this article, I was told by my oncologist that the targeted therapy had failed and I was to move onto chemotherapy. Staring at me were a whole host of possible side effects and uncertain prognosis; so I decided to again meditate and act on my long held attitude that "the Lord must become greater and I must become less". Firstly, to adopt heavenly principles as the basis of my judgement and to give God's absolute sovereignty my wholehearted respect; secondly, to assess my position from the point of what I have already received and give thanks for all the drips and drabs during my fight against Monster Cancer in the last one year; and finally, to look at life from a holistic standpoint, affirming that suffering is nothing but a blessing in disguise, pleading with God for perseverance to await His ultimate goodwill.

Johnson Wong

ONLY THOSE WHO ARE NOT CAN HAVE ALL 07/03/2016

During my last six months of recuperation at home, I have had the chance to reflect upon the faith I have upheld since my teenage years; and with Easter just around the corner, it is also a good time to have an overview of the gospel we share with others.

Since time unknown, instead of remembering the resurrection of Jesus Christ three days after His death on the cross, Easter has become one of those commercialized festivals when chocolate rabbits and Easter eggs flood the supermarket shelves. “Jesus Christ has risen from the dead” is the crux of the gospel while the gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes (Rom.1:16). However, why on earth are people paying less and less attention to the gospel? Is it because the gospel is unattractive? Or is it because we are not sharing the gospel the way it should be?

This reminds me of an educated and cultured friend – in the past he regarded Christianity as unscientific, only the weak would believe such a God with blind faith; certainly someone like himself who was well trained in physical science would never need to rely on such an illusion. It was after he was struck down by a serious illness declared incurable by the doctors when he remembered Christians telling him that God is love and God is almighty. He quickly made a vow to God, “If I get cured, I’ll follow you faithfully for the rest of my life!” No sooner when his illness persisted, he changed his mind and declared, “This God of Christianity can’t help me at all, I better try Buddha before it is too late!”

In actual fact, whether someone accepts or rejects Christ has nothing to do with age, race or education level. An elderly scientist cum Community party member from China can choose to reject; so can a local young chap who went through infant baptism and grew up in church. The real obstacle lies in the reluctance of an individual to admit his status as a born sinner, by that I mean the ingrained attitude of “Not taking God as God, self-centeredness, man will conquer nature, what is the point of having God?” With original sin comes sinful thoughts such as greed, envy and hatred, and sinful thoughts will eventually result in deceit, theft and revenge.

Hence it is inconceivable not to talk about sin if we want to share the gospel in its entirety, for if man has not sinned against God, there is no need for a saviour. Unfortunately it is not uncommon

for Christians to subconsciously make the following two mistakes when we share the gospel:

1. Just like a salesperson trying to push his goods, one can fall into the trap of overemphasising how Christianity is more scientific than other religions, how it contains more wisdom than any philosophies, how wise a choice it is if one chooses to believe in Jesus.
2. Trying to impress by highlighting just the “love” of God, that God would guarantee you success, health and a happy family. Come and receive this gospel which requires no repentance of sin, come and believe this God that grants you every wish.

What this form of “gospel” depicts is essentially self-centredness. If someone “believes in” Christ because he thinks the Christian teachings satisfies his intellectual appetite, so much so that Jesus might as well be grateful that he has not chosen Buddha instead. What happens when he encounters another religion which appears classier - it would probably be time to say a quick goodbye to Jesus. In the same manner, someone who only sees God as “love” would soon change tag when he finds out that Jesus does not fulfill his every wish; looking for a more “efficacious” god will truly be on the cards.

“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (I Corinthians 1:27-31)

God chooses only those who are not. Only those who are not can have all through Jesus, His wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption; only then will man truly know how to live, how to treat others, how to behave properly, and how to lead a life worthy of the calling to eternity. To believe in Jesus

requires one to admit that he is an absolute sinner, that he can do no good by himself, nothing and nothing to boast about, and that his life was heading nowhere but eternal death. He has to declare that he needs salvation through Jesus Christ, that he is willing to surrender his life to Christ with total trust and obedience; for “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me”.

As we celebrate Easter, let us examine our faith in front of God and check on the gospel we share, for our Lord Jesus is the only centre of attention of Easter.

當跑的路

22/08/2016

The Race to be Run

(Originally written in Chinese, translated by Yin Leng as Johnson was very weak at that time)

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 (ESV)

The 31st Summer Olympics officially opened on the 6th of this month in Rio de Janeiro. As in previous times, unfavorable news started circulating on the eve of the Opening Ceremony – other than the commonly seen project delays, budget overrun, protest marches and so forth, there were also cases of internationally well-known sportspersons withdrawing because of the rampant spread of the Zika virus causing expectant mothers to bear children potentially developing microcephaly.

Tourists or business travelers to Brazil will find that the WHO Vaccination Guidelines state that one needs to suffer some ‘pain’ before departure – the holes in the arm together with the vaccination costs involved are frightful! Yellow Fever, malaria, typhoid, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, influenza, cholera ... and there are some that do not yet have vaccines, such as AIDS and dengue fever, and some to which attention needs to be paid as they are hard to detect. From this consideration, the retreat of some competitors seems reasonable and those who decided to continue to travel overseas in order to compete are commendable. So what is the reason that drives these latter competitors to take such risks?

If it is for the sake of honour, this risk is not worth it as not only are many competitors quite unrenowned, but even their sporting event, such as synchronized swimming and Greco-Roman wrestling, are quite obscure. Apart from happening in the once-in-four years Olympics, they are virtually unheard of the rest of the time. And if you tried to search for information relevant to such sports or games through the sporting media, it is like trying to recover a needle from the ocean. In addition, as these events are all nonprofessional, even if you were a gold medalist for five straight Olympics, it would be a fantasy to try to make a living out of such sporting events.

During a send-off ceremony, in response to a question from a reporter for why she was determined to compete, a competitor representing Australia in the 10K Road Race replied, “Because this is a race I need to run!” In a surprised tone, she affirmed, “I represent my country, my country’s 24 million people. From the moment I was selected for the Olympics, I was no longer for myself – my only goal is to receive the glorious crown prepared for me. No matter how difficult the road, however many the challenges, however many times I might fall, I must always get up to run again, until I finish the race.”

In the past few months, a fracture has developed in my right pelvic bone from the invasion of cancer cells. The pain from the pelvic fracture, together with muscular weakness from atrophy of

my thigh muscles have combined to make walking very strenuous, with every step like lifting a tonne weight. I was initially very determined to continue attending Sunday worship services, but had to give that up for now. I just have to sing hymns, read my bible, and pray at home, remotely keeping in step with the brothers and sisters in offering thanksgiving and praise.

Truly, items for thanksgiving are innumerable – last week, when my pain index hit the ceiling, and increasing the pain medication many times over seemed to be just a drop in the ocean, just when I was in the midst of a fearful helpless state, an elderly overseas sister (in Christ) whom I have not seen for some years, visited. She brought along a bottle of ointment which was recently used for her terminally-ill (with cancer) husband and insisted on massaging me to alleviate my pain. I breathed in the strong fragrance of the winter-green oil and watched my godsend angel massage my calf. With the regular rhythmic rubbing, what was originally a swollen right leg with lymphoedema soon regained distinguishable features of muscle and bone, and the pain also subsided considerably.

I do not know how long such types of improvements will last, but a mystery that I had in mind for some time has now been solved. I had not known why four or five mature Christians had all given me the same reminder: Remember this! In the midst of trials, experience the grace and faithfulness of God. Praise God! He has promised me that His grace is sufficient for me. Praise God! He has told me that even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, His rod and His staff will comfort me, guide me. God's word is trustworthy, unchanging. It will not be made void. It is only necessary for me to ask and receive.

However weak my body may become – it is a perishable body after all – yet my heart is renewed daily because the Lord Jesus Christ lives in me. Therefore, for that eternal crown, I have become a runner, running on that heaven-ward path.

Dad's Prayer Points

(By Simeon Wong at Combined Prayer meeting of CCCB HET &SLE held on Sunday Sept 25th 2016)

Thank you to everyone for coming to this prayer meeting for Dad today. It means a lot to him knowing that the church is constantly praying for him. I'd love to share a few prayer points now from Dad and our family. I hope this helps us as we pray to our heavenly Father together.

Firstly, we would love to thank and praise God with you for our family-in-Christ. Dad has treasured every moment spent with friends from both HET and SLE. In particular we want to thank the many people who have come to sing for him. Hearing Gospel truth through song has been wonderful for Dad. We also want to thank God with you for all the practical help we've received. Sometimes it is the smallest act of Gospel-centred love that provides the clearest window into God's prodigal love for His people. And so we want to thank you all for your love and support during this time.

We would also love to praise God with you that Dad's pain is well controlled. The Wesley staff have provided excellent care and have helped him feel as comfortable as possible. Unfortunately with painkillers comes drowsiness, but we thank God that Dad's mind is still relatively sharp. The time we have spent as a family reflecting on treasured memories has been incredibly precious. And although the time Dad has left is very short, eternity with God is remarkably long.

For our family, praise God for the health, energy and joy He has given us. We are very tired, and Mum in particular is exhausted. Yet God has shown us extraordinary grace for this extraordinary trial. We would love to thank God with you for what we are learning in our suffering. How He has humbled us to pray with utter dependence on His grace. How we are slowly but surely learning how to suffer well as His children. And how the hope-filled certainty we have in Jesus alone is becoming more precious to us than anything else in the world. Finally, praise God for the comfort, assurance and hope we have in Jesus. The weight of suffering Dad has experienced has been heavy, and at times, brutal. Yet how wonderful is the fact that not even an ounce of his suffering lies outside the assuring boundaries of God's

sovereign wisdom, goodness and love. Even as things get worse, please pray that God would help us feel the gravity of what Jesus has done, and that it will help us persevere in these dark days to come.

These are the prayer points Dad and our family want to share with you all. Over the past week our family has been reading through a book called 'O Love That Will Not Let Me Go' edited by Nancy Guthrie. It has been an incredibly comforting read. In particular, Dad really enjoyed the first chapter by J. I. Packer. I'd love to begin our time of prayer by praying through a section of that chapter. If you could join me in prayer - let's pray to our heavenly Father together.

Father-in-Heaven, for those who do not trust in Your Son, death is in truth a fearsome thing. If not for Your saving grace, we would all be eternally separated from You. We would all do well, therefore, to fear death. But grace has intervened and death's sting has been withdrawn. We praise You that our death day has now become an appointment with our Saviour. We will be closer to Christ than ever before, and that is better by far.

None of us knows the day on which we will die. And so we pray for wisdom to prepare ourselves to leave this world at any time. May each day find us like children looking forward to our holidays, packed up and ready to go a long time in advance. Help us keep short accounts with You Lord, knowing that our account with You in heaven and in the new creation will stretch into eternity.

For Dad, Father we pray that You will help him remain faithful till his last breath. Grow his anticipation, Lord, for the very near day when he will be with Jesus. The physical process of dying has been gruesome for Dad. Yet dying in Christ, through Christ, and with Christ, will be a spiritual blossoming. Death, for the believer, is no tragedy. And for the believer to die well - to live and die aiming to glorify God, confident that God will make good on all of His promises - this is a thing of great beauty. Please help Dad, our family and our church treasure this truth now. May You enable Dad to say, 'It is well. I am ready to go home.' For the glory of Your name, and the enduring joy of Your people, Amen!

Postscript

Dear Brothers & Sisters of Huai En Tang,

Our dearly beloved and revered Elder Johnson Wong has ceased from his labour on earth and returned to be with the Lord. His testimony is like Paul's:

"as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel."

Phil 1:20 - 27

Emotionally, we very much may not want Elder Johnson to depart from us, but we should remember what he exhorted us while on his sick bed – to do our best to spread the Gospel, and to bring our children to the Lord. We should also remember his gentleness, humility, his modelling of Christ through his service to the Church and to all people. We too shall hold firmly to our faith and hope. We shall all meet in our surpassingly wonderful family home in heaven. May we encourage one another, that no one may be lost!

In Christ,

Pastor Hsieh