

Jehovah-Rapha

It was one of those beautiful Portland, Oregon summer mornings. The sky was blue, the sun mildly warm, and my sciatic nerve pain steadily increasing! I had just completed my seminary training (five grueling years of study, work, church involvement, and family growth). Seminary was done, but my family and I were not ready to jump into pastoral ministry, so I remained a UPS employee. On that warm morning, I was dressed in my UPS browns and making deliveries in the residential portion of my route. All of that stepping in and out of the truck was taking its toll. Gradually my noticeable limp developed into full blown agony with each step and turn. By lunch time the pain was shooting down my lower back into my right leg; I could hardly move without grimacing in anguish. As I hurriedly downed my sandwich and fruit, I seriously considered calling my supervisors and asking for a replacement driver. Then I remembered to pray, "Lord, have mercy." In seconds the pain evaporated, and I went on to finish my delivery route and pickups without any further trace of pain. Amazing! A healing? I believe so; at a minimum it certainly was an act of grace. God delivered me that day from my physical pain. Typically, it would have taken days and sometimes weeks for the nerve throbbing to diminish with the help of ibuprofen, a trip to the chiropractor, and rest. I had prayed before, but never with those results. Was this a permanent healing? No, I continued to suffer with this ailment periodically for several more years. But a new trust reality was awakened in me on that day. There was a fresh dimension in my understanding of how God loved me. He not only cared for my soul but also my body. He had not only healed me spiritually but cared for me physically. We are whole people. God is the Great Physician of body and soul. Jeremiah lamented in his prophecy (8:22), "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" The good news is that there is and His name is Jehovah-Rapha.

This name first appears in Exodus 15:26. In the context of the covenant God had made with Israel He was announcing that if they keep His commandments He would protect their health because, "I, the LORD, am your healer." What is remarkable about this is that it stands in striking contrast to the other religions of the day. Certainly, most ancient people prayed to their gods for healing, however, never once do we hear of the "deity" taking the initiative to offer healing to the people. It's always the people trying to convince, cajole, threaten or bribe the god or the gods with rituals and sacrifices to obtain this healing. However, once again in contrast to the gods of the nations we see our

great Yahweh moving out of Himself to engage people in a most personal and practical way. Just as Abraham needed to learn to trust Yahweh, so did Israel. In Exodus 15 God continues to reveal Himself, here as their healer, the giver of health.

One caution, if you are looking for a pattern of how God heals from the Bible, you will be disappointed. Sometimes there is physical contact with the sick person by someone interceding. Other times, God intervenes directly. Sometimes there is a symbolic act, like putting clay on blind eyes or anointing with oil. Sometimes the context of the situation makes such things impossible. Apparent healing virtue is found in inanimate objects at times, such as the river Jordan where Nahman washed, the hem of Jesus' robe the hemorrhaging woman touched, and the cloths taken from Peter's body. In fact, we are told that even Peter's shadow had healing power!

The one constant in all of this is that God does the healing according to His will and good purposes. Throughout the book of Acts, when God heals people, the Apostles waste no time taking bows or explaining the techniques of healing. They immediately give the glory to God and begin to preach the Gospel. Often times God used these instances of physical healing to open eyes to the need for spiritual healing.

Many of us who suffer from chronic ailments may struggle with the question of why God doesn't heal everyone. Here are three observations:

First, He will heal every Christian. Remember this life is just a fractional part of the totality of eternity. Once we shed this body and are re clothed in a heavenly body, all our ailments will disappear.

Of course, the question remains why He heals some of us in this life and not others. The second observation is that God is sovereign. He is El Elyon. What that means is that He is not our puppet or our servant. He makes the decisions. However, since we know that He is good and loving, we can be sure that those decisions are in our best interests, even if we cannot understand it this side of Glory.

Finally, there is often a purpose in our suffering. James writes about how trials purify our faith; certainly living with illness is one of those trials. (James 1:1-7) Paul was not healed from his ailment so that He could experience the sufficiency of God's grace in new and strengthening ways. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) Sometimes

physical infirmities are directly related to personal sin. The consequences of physical suffering in these cases can be wake up calls to our sin and need for forgiveness. (James 5:14-16)

Whether we are healed or not healed God's grace is supplied, both for His glory. In either case The Great Physician is intimately with us, sustaining us or healing us. May we exalt the Father as Jesus did as we experience His Jehovah Rapha presence.

Assignment

1. Read Exodus 15:22-27. How did the children of Israel arrive at Morah? Was it an accident? (Exodus 13:21-22) What was the problem? What was Israel's response? What does Moses do? What was the solution? What do you learn about healing here?

2. Consider some uses of the words heal or health in the Bible. Read the following scriptures and decide how healing is used:

Psalm 38:1-3

Psalms 41:1-4

Psalm 103:1-3

Psalm 147:3

Isaiah 53:4-5/1 Peter 2:24-25

3. Jesus brought healing into His earthly ministry. Read Mathew 8:16-17 and Luke 4:18. What kind of healings did Jesus accomplish? Who benefitted from His merciful deliverance?

4. How is Jehovah Rapha like a strong tower? Where do you run for healing whether physical, emotional or spiritual? Can you share times when you have experienced the God who heals you? Read Matthew 9:10-13. Can you admit that you need a physician?