

Illness--the Fast Day

by John Newton

The speaker reflects on the nature of illness and God's sovereignty, while also expressing concerns about the state of the people and the need for genuine repentance.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 119:71, Isaiah 53:6, Luke 15:4, John 10:11, 1 Peter 5:4

Topics: "Suffering And Faith", "Repentance And Revival"

Description

John Newton, in a letter dated February 23, 1779, shares about his experiences with affliction and the faithfulness of the Lord in both healing and chastening. He reflects on the national state and spiritual condition of the people, emphasizing the need for repentance and lamenting over sin. Despite the lack of belief or regard from many, he finds encouragement in the few who hear, believe, and are saved, recognizing their immense value. Newton also expresses his pastoral care for a sheep under his charge who is gravely ill, pointing to the Great Shepherd's ultimate care and provision for His flock.

Transcript

Feb. 23, 1779.

My dear Friend,

On Saturday, and not before, I heard you had been ill. Had the news reached me sooner, I should have sent you a line sooner. I hope you will be able to inform me that you are now better, and that the Lord continues to do you good by every dispensation he allots you. Healing and wounding are equally from his hand, and equally tokens of his love and care over us. I have but little affliction in my own person, but I have been oftener chastened of late by proxy. The Lord, for his people's sake, is still pleased to give me health and strength for public service: but, when I need the rod, he lays it upon Mrs. ****. In this way I have felt much without being disabled or laid aside. But he has heard prayer for her likewise, and for more than a fortnight past she has been comfortably well. I lay at least one half of her sickness to my own account. She suffers for me, and I through her. It is, indeed, touching me in a tender part. Perhaps if I could be more wise, watchful, and humble, it might contribute more to the re-establishment of her health than all the medicine she takes.

I somehow neglected to confer with you about the business of the fast day. The last of my three sermons, when I had, as I expected, the largest congregation, was a sort of historical discourse, from Dent. 32:15; in which, running over the leading national events from the time of Wickliff, I endeavoured to trace the steps

and turns by which the Lord has made us a fat and thriving people, and in the event blessed us, beyond his favourite Jeshurun of old, with civil and religious liberty, peace, honour, and prosperity, and Gospel privileges. How fat we were when the war terminated in the year 1763, and how we have kicked and forsaken the Rock of our salvation of late years! Then followed a sketch of our present state and spirit as a people, both in a religious and political view. I started at the picture while I drew it, though it was a very inadequate representation. We seemed willing to afflict our souls for one day, as Dr. Louth reads, Isa. 58:5. But the next day things returned into their former channel: the fast and the occasion seemed presently forgotten, except by a few simple souls, who are despised and hated by the rest for their preciseness, because they think sin ought to be lamented every day in the year.

Who would envy Cassandra her gift of prophecy upon the terms she had it; that her declarations, however true, should meet with no belief or regard? It is the lot of Gospel ministers, with respect to the bulk of their hearers. But blessed be the grace which makes a few exceptions! Here and there, one will hear, believe, and be saved. Every one of these is worth a world; and our success with a few should console us for all our trials.

Come and see us as soon as you can, only not to-morrow, for I am then to go to T****. My Lord, the Great Shepherd, has one sheep there, related to the fold under my care. I can seldom see her, and she is very ill. I expect she will be soon removed to the pasture above. Our love to Mrs. B****.

Believe me yours, &c.

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