

A Permanent Health Care Solution

***“Bless the LORD,
O my soul, and
forget not all his
benefits: . . . who
healeth all thy
diseases; Who
redeemeth thy life
from destruction;
who crowneth
thee with
lovingkindness
and tender
mercies; . . . so
that thy youth is
renewed like
the eagle’s.”
—Psalm 103:2-5***

DURING THE PAST CENTURY, because of advances in medicine and many other fields, man’s life expectancy has increased substantially. Worldwide, it has more than doubled. A person born in 1916 was expected to live, on average, no more than 35 years. A century later, in 2016, this number had increased to 72 years. In the United States, life expectancy at birth has risen from 52 years in 1916 to just under 80 years now, an increase of more than 50%.

Accompanying these increases in life expectancy, however, has been the financial pain and strain of skyrocketing costs. Whether doctor, hospital,

medication, rehabilitation, long-term care, health insurance, or other expenses, the total cost of health care has risen to unprecedented, and seemingly unsustainable, levels. According to 2015 data published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, annual health care costs are slightly under \$10,000 per person in the United States. To put it another way, expenses related to health care presently make up a staggering 17% of our country's total economic output, and this is likely to increase to 20% by the year 2020.

HEALTH CARE REFORMS

Over the years, many proposals have been offered, and some enacted into law, which attempt to ease the burden of health care expenses to the consumer. Most of these programs have also been designed to provide benefits to those who would otherwise be unable to afford medical care. One landmark example was in 1965, when legislation was enacted that introduced Medicare, covering both hospital and a significant portion of medical expenses for senior citizens.

Other health care reforms have been put into place in intervening years. The most notable of these was in 2010, when the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, also known to most simply as the Affordable Care Act, or by the nickname "Obamacare," was enacted. This legislation was designed to eliminate the practices of some insurance companies to screen pre-existing conditions, load premiums, cancel policies on technicalities, and put caps on annual and lifetime coverage. It was also intended to create price competition by enabling consumers to compare and

shop for insurance through a web-based health insurance exchange, while preserving private insurance and health care provider options already in place.

NEW ADMINISTRATION—NEW PROPOSALS

With Donald Trump's victory in last year's presidential election, a new administration and a different political party has entered the White House. The incoming president, not surprisingly, has called for a different health care plan, and the repeal of the Affordable Care Act. Since its enactment seven years ago, numerous objections have been raised against the current system. Some of these are: It imposes a tax penalty on people who do not purchase health insurance; the tax penalty, in turn, pressures healthy people to purchase policies they do not want; the system provides for income-based subsidies; and it increases taxes on wealthy Americans and segments of the medical industry to help finance the plan's overall implementation.

At the time of this writing, a bill to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act sent to the U.S. House of Representatives by President Trump's team has been withdrawn. Ultra-conservative Republican members of the House said it did not go far enough towards the dismantling of the present system, and vowed to vote against it. This, along with complete Democratic Party opposition to any repeal, doomed the legislation's passage. In coming weeks, further developments will most likely transpire, including perhaps the introduction of revised legislation to Congress.

Regardless of what happens as a result of the present administration's handling of the issue of health care, no plan which may be approved by

Congress and signed into law is likely to get a majority of people excited. The health care situation in America presents a simple, but stark, reality. We cannot afford to have it, but we also cannot afford to be without it. Like many of the problems of our day, it seems not to have a workable solution.

Indeed, any solution is only temporary. Health care, even at its best, is a matter of adding a few more years to the dying process. In many cases, it is simply making a person as comfortable as possible until the inevitable end—death—arrives. Man alone can offer no permanent method for achieving lasting health and life, regardless of what he may accomplish in the way of health care for a few short years. There is an answer, though, to humanity's continuing desire for health and life. It does not involve doctors, hospitals, man-made medicines, or health insurance. Rather, it is the permanent healing power of God.

THE GREAT PHYSICIAN

In our opening text, God is represented as a great physician who heals all the diseases of his people. The Prophet Isaiah additionally foretells a day when earth's inhabitants "shall not say, I am sick," and prophecies of a time to come when all blind eyes shall be opened, deaf ears unstopped, the lame will leap, and the mouth of the dumb shall sing.—Isa. 33:24; 35:5,6

Disease and death are man's greatest enemies. We know this from observation and experience, for the seeds of disease and infirmity are working in all of us, leading gradually to disability, aging, and finally death. Despite the best efforts of twenty-first

century medical science, millions succumb to this great enemy while they are young and at the prime of life. Every aspect of man's present existence is made uncertain by the inevitability of death.

REALITY OF DEATH TAUGHT IN THE BIBLE

Diseases of all kinds are simply an evidence that the human race is dying. They are the attendants of death, and the Apostle Paul informs us that Christ must reign until he has destroyed this enemy. (I Cor. 15:25,26) The destruction of death will include the elimination of disease which brings it to pass. The Apostle John, describing the meaning of the vision given to him by Christ, said that a time was coming when there would be "no more death," that God would remove tears from all eyes, all pain would cease, and grief and mourning would end. (Rev. 21:4) Indeed, one of the things which stamps the Bible with the mark of authenticity is that it proclaims the reality of death by its promises that God plans to eradicate this great enemy in his due time.

The Scriptures reveal that it is God's purpose to make an end of sin and death through his son Christ Jesus, and that through him health and life would come to the people. This fact is emphasized by a message Jesus sent to John the Baptist. John had been imprisoned, and while previously he had announced Jesus as the foretold Messiah, and thoroughly believed that he was, he later sought reassurance. In this frame of mind, he sent two of his disciples to Jesus asking, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?"—Matt. 11:3

Jesus asked the messengers to return to John and tell him what they had seen. They saw that all

manner of diseases were being healed, and even the dead were being raised. They also witnessed that the gospel was being preached to the poor. (vss. 4,5) Jesus knew that John the Baptist would take these things as proof that the Messiah, the Christ, truly had come, for John knew that these were the works which God had promised the Messiah would accomplish on behalf of the people.

HEALING A FOREGLEAM

As we have already seen, Jesus healed various diseases and infirmities of the people. The twelve apostles were also given this power. An example of this was the healing by Peter of the lame man who sat at the entrance to the Temple asking alms. This man had been lame from the time of his birth, but when Peter gave the word of authority, he was restored to soundness of limb. When the people inquired by what authority and power this man had been healed, Peter explained that it was through Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom they had crucified.—Acts 3:1-16

However, Peter did not stop with this answer to their question. Instead, he continued and explained that after Jesus Christ returned at his Second Advent, there would come “times of restitution of all things.” This time of general restitution, or restoration, Peter further explained, had been foretold by the mouth of all God’s “holy prophets since the world began.”—vss. 20,21

The lesson here is clear, and the conclusion unmistakable. Peter had healed a lame man. It was accomplished through his belief in Christ. Using this as the basis of his sermon, the apostle explained that there would be a time of general

restoration following the return of Christ, and that it was this which all God's prophets had foretold. God's program to return health and life to the people, therefore, was not due to be inaugurated until after Christ's Second Coming and the establishment of his kingdom.

DIVINE PROMISES

This feature of God's plan has not failed, nor will it fail. When put into operation, it will result in a complete fulfillment of all the divine promises of health and life. All the blind eyes will be opened; all the deaf ears will be unstopped; all the lame will be healed. No one in the entire world who accepts the provision of God's grace through Christ will then need to say, "I am sick."

We see that the public mind in ancient times expected some outstanding demonstration of divine authority and power on the part of those whom they accepted as having been sent by God. Israel's God had fought for them in battle and destroyed their enemies. Some of his prophets had raised the dead. The Jews in Jesus' day would find it difficult to accept Jesus as the greatest of all their prophets—indeed, the one whom they had said would come—if his works were not greater than all the previous prophets.

This was one reason why Jesus' ministry was accompanied by miracles—the healing of the sick and the raising of the dead. In doing this, however, he was also giving object lessons of what he, as the promised Messiah, would do for the whole world, and upon a permanent basis, when God's due time would come for this feature of his plan to be inaugurated.

RESTORATION—DURING CHRIST’S KINGDOM

It is God’s will that ultimately all who accept Christ and obey the laws of his kingdom will be restored to health and live forever as human beings. Each of the holy prophets, in one way or another, foretold a worldwide program to bring health and life to mankind. Jesus referred to it as a time of “regeneration.” (Matt. 19:28) As already noted, the Apostle Peter described it as the “times of restitution of all things.” Jesus, however, did not initiate this program at his First Advent, nor did he promise any of his disciples that they could expect to be divinely cured of their physical ailments because of their faith in him.

The work of restoring the human race to life is to be accomplished during the thousand-year reign of Christ. (Rev. 20:6) During the short period of Jesus’ First Advent ministry, he preached the hope of the kingdom. In connection with his oral message he gave many practical demonstrations of what kingdom blessings would mean for the people when the due time arrived for the promises of God to be fulfilled. Jesus’ miracles, as we have already noted, were not designated to initiate a program of healing for this present age, but were intended to be illustrations of the divine purpose for the Messianic kingdom.

SIN ALSO TO BE REMOVED

Leprosy was prevalent in Jesus’ day, and at that time it was considered incurable. Because of this it was a fitting symbol of sin, which, from the standpoint of human ability, is also incurable. Death came into the world because of sin. (Rom. 5:12) When Jesus cleansed the lepers of his day, he was

illustrating God's intention ultimately to remove the blight of sin from the earth and to destroy death, the result of sin.

On this point, God had promised through the Prophet Isaiah: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land." (Isa. 1:18,19) Notice that the promise does not assure a home in heaven, but that the willing and obedient "shall eat the good of the land," because they will be cleansed from sin.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

As noted earlier, the Prophet Isaiah, in his forecast of the time when mankind would be restored to health and life, wrote that all the blind eyes would be opened. He also prophesied that the lame would leap like a deer. It was in keeping with this that Jesus, to show forth the glory and power of his coming Messianic work, restored sight to some of the blind in his day, and healed various of the lame. (Matt. 15:30) By these and other miracles done for a limited few, he foreshadowed the "times of restitution," which will not just be for some, but for all who come to heart obedience to the righteous laws of the kingdom.

Death itself will be destroyed by divine power. Through the agency of Christ's kingdom, God "will swallow up death in victory," and "wipe away tears from off all faces." (Isa. 25:8) Jesus illustrated this promised victory by awakening some from the sleep of death, thus demonstrating that this great enemy

does not stand in the way of God's plan for restoring the people to health and life. Indeed, the tears of sorrow which the family and friends of Lazarus had shed, including those of Jesus, were wiped away when he was awakened from death.—John 11:31-45

While Jesus awakened Lazarus and others who had died, they did not remain alive. However, all who are awakened during the millennial reign of Christ and who then obey the laws of that kingdom will gain life everlasting. The purpose of their awakening will be to give them the opportunity to learn, believe, obey from the heart, and live forever. It will be only those who refuse to hear and obey that will be “destroyed from among the people.”—Acts 3:23

“SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS”

The time when God's program of healing and restoration takes place is symbolically described in the prophecy of Malachi as the rising of the “Sun of righteousness . . . with healing in his wings.” (Mal. 4:2) What a meaningful illustration is given here. For 6,000 years, mankind has been enshrouded in the darkness of sin, sickness, and death. Satan, the god of this “present evil world,” has blinded their minds concerning the true God of love. (II Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4) Not knowing God, they have stumbled in darkness on the “broad” road that leads to destruction.—Matt. 7:13,14

However, when the kingdom of Christ becomes operative for the blessing of the people, how different it will be. The Sun of righteousness will then be shining. Associated with Jesus in this work of enlightening and blessing the world will be his church. Concerning these, Jesus said that they

would “shine forth as the sun” in that glorious kingdom.—Matt. 13:43

They will share with him in the “greater works” which Jesus promised. (John 14:12) How much better the restoration of the kingdom will be than the healing efforts of today. God’s ways and plans are always better than those of men. Therefore, let us continue to pray for his kingdom to come, and for his will to be done in earth, even as it is done in heaven.—Matt. 6:10

Our opening text says of God, the great physician of mankind, that he will heal all diseases, provide life through redemption, pour out loving-kindness and tender mercy, and renew the youth of all. What a glorious prospect for mankind is thus set forth by the Creator. It is, indeed, his ultimate purpose concerning the human race. Though the “wages of sin is death,” along with its accompanying processes of sickness and disease, we are assured that “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”—Rom. 6:23

SYMBOLS OF LIFE

John the Revelator records the various symbols, which he saw in vision, that describe the blessings of health and life that will be available to all under the administration of Christ’s kingdom. First, he speaks of a “pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” (Rev. 22:1) The throne of God is symbolic of the divine authority that will be exercised in the earth through Christ’s kingdom. The association of the Lamb with this picture reminds us that the blessings of life represented by the river will be available

only because of the shed blood of the “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”—John 1:29

We next note the revelator’s reference to the “tree of life,” which was beside the river, and that the leaves of this tree are “for the healing of the nations.” (Rev. 22:2) How thankful we are that the people of all nations are to be given the opportunity to be healed, and to partake of the symbolic tree of life, from which the human race was once barred because of sin. (Gen. 3:24) John also informs us that when the river of life is flowing for the blessing of the people, the invitation to partake of its life-giving nutrients will be extended to “whosoever will.” We read: “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. . . . And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”—Rev. 22:17

The bride who gives the invitation to “come” is the church of Christ, united with him in glory. (II Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7,8; 21:2,9) These will have proven worthy of this high position by suffering and dying with him during this present Gospel Age. In God’s plan these, who are “faithful unto death,” are rewarded with “glory and honour and immortality,” and will reign with Christ. (Rev. 2:10; Rom. 2:7; II Tim. 2:10-12) They will share with him in the wonderful work of healing all mankind from their diseases and extending everlasting, perfect human life to all who will accept the invitation to drink of the water of life. “Blessed” will be those “that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life.” (Rev. 22:14) Thus, with so many promises of the Bible to strengthen our faith, let us look forward with joyful anticipation to God’s permanent health care solution for all mankind! ■