

Suffering and Illness I-III: Blessed Theophylact



Blessed Theophylact Archbishop of Ochrid (c. 1050/1060-c.1108), received the best education that the Orthodox Roman Empire could provide. He became one of the most famous Orthodox scholars and exegetes. Ordained a deacon in Constantinople, he served in the Great Church of Hagia Sophia and became tutor to the future son-in-law of Emperor Alexios I Comnenos. Consecrated a bishop at age 25 against his will, he was sent to Bulgaria serving as Metropolitan there for 25 years. It was in Bulgaria that he wrote his famous *Explanation of the New Testament* and commentaries on the Psalms and Minor Prophets for the Princess Maria

Source of Photo: <http://www.jobnsanidopoulos.com/2010/12/saint-theophylact-of-ochrid.html>

Explanation of the Gospel of John, Chapter 5:14-16

by

The Blessed Theophylact, Archbishop of Ochrid and Bulgaria

(John) 14-16 Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, **Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.** The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, Who had made him whole. And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath day.

The Lord's words to the paralytic, *Behold thou art made whole; sin no more*, confirm the truth of these two doctrines--illness in man stems from sin, and the punishment in hell is eternal. No one can now say, "I fornicated only for an hour; my punishment cannot last forever." Behold this man: his years of sin were far fewer than the many years of his punishment, which lasted almost a lifetime. Sin is not judged by how long it took to commit, but by the gravity of the transgression. We also learn from the Lord's words that even though we have already paid a harsh penalty for sins, if we defile ourselves again with the same transgressions, we will be punished more severely than before--and rightly so. If a man does not correct his ways after his first punishment, it shows he is insensible and contemptuous and must be dealt with more harshly. But why are not all punished in this manner? Many of the wicked are healthy and energetic, and seem to pass their days merrily. But this absence of suffering in the present life becomes the grounds for even greater punishment in the next. Paul confirms this: *But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened*, meaning, in this life, so *that we should not be condemned with the world* [I Cor. 11:32], that is, in the next life. The chastisements we receive in this life are mere admonitions; in the next life they are true punishments.

So then, all all illnesses the result of sin? Not all, but most. The ailments of the paralytic, and of the man who suffered pain in his legs (as recorded in the Book of Kings [see III Kings 15:23]), were caused by sin. Other illnesses are given as a test or as a sign of God's approval, as with Job, whose virtue was revealed in his afflictions. Still others result from excess of various kinds, such as gluttony and drunkenness. Some have supposed that His words, *Sin no more*, indicate the Lord's foreknowledge

that the paralytic would reveal Him to the Jews after meeting Him in the temple. But this interpretation is incorrect, for the piety of the man was obvious from the very fact that the Evangelist says, *Jesus findeth him in the temple*. Had he not been pious, he would have run home to escape the intense interrogation by the Jews and given himself over to eating, drinking, and relaxation. But none of these temptations kept him from the temple. When he recognizes Jesus, he gratefully proclaims Him to the Jews. Instead of trying to mollify them by saying, “It was Jesus Who told me to take up my bed,” he confesses boldly, “It was Jesus Who made me whole.” Such gratitude infuriated them, for they regarded healing on the Sabbath to be a violation of the law. Although the Jews subsequently persecuted the Lord, the man did not sin by revealing Him to them. He sincerely proclaimed his Healer in order to draw others to Christ. If the Jews chose to persecute his Benefactor, that was their sin...

From **Explanation by Blessed Theophylact of the Gospel According to John**, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2007, pp. 83-4.

[Note: A very nice biography of Archbishop Theophylact can be found at http://www.chrysostompress.org/theophylact_of_ochrid.html]

Suffering and Illness II: Blessed Theophylact

Explanation of the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 13:10-17 by

The Blessed Theophylact, Archbishop of Ochrid and Bulgaria

Luke 10-17. And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over, and could in no wise straighten herself. And when Jesus saw her,

He called her to Him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight and glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the sabbath day. The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ow or his ass from the stall, and lead it away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, who Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? And when He ha said these things, all His adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.

The woman suffered from this affliction as a result of demonic assault, as the Lord Himself says, *This woman...whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years.* Perhaps God had departed from her on account of certain sins, and as a result Satan was punishing her. For Satan is in part the cause of all the hardships which afflict our bodies, when God on high permits him.

From the very beginning it was Satan who brought about our fall by which we lost the incorruptibility in which we had been created; it was Satan who caused us to be bound to diseased bodies prone to suffering, symbolized by the garments of dead skins in which Adam and Eve were wrapped. But now the Lord, with the majestic voice of the Godhead, full of power, drives out the infirmity of this woman. He places His hands on her, so that we might learn that His holy flesh imparted both the power and

energy of the Logos. For His flesh was His own, and not that of some other human person alongside Him, separate from Him in hypostasis, as the impious Nestorius thinks.

So great is the goodness of the Lord, Who in this manner took mercy on His own creation. But Satan, who had bound the woman in the first place, was vexed at her deliverance because he desired her continued affliction, and so he bound the ruler of the synagogue with spite, and through the mouth of this man, Satan reviled the miracle. This is how he always attacks the good.

Therefore the Lord uses the apt example of irrational animals to rebuke the man who was indignant that a healing had taken place on the sabbath. And thus not only this man, but all the other adversaries of Jesus as well, were put to shame by Christ's words. For it was insane to hinder the healing of a man on the sabbath using as a pretext the commandment that the sabbath be a day of rest.

So it was, that even while the people were rejoicing at the Lord's deeds, His adversaries were put to shame by His words. For these adversaries, rather than joining in the jubilation which followed His work of healing, instead burned with rage that He had healed at all. But the multitude, because they derived benefit from His signs, rejoiced and took pleasure in this healing.

You must also understand these miracles to refer to the inner man. The soul is bent over in infirmity whenever it inclines to earthly thought alone and imagines nothing that is heavenly and

divine. It can truly be said that this soul has been infirm for eighteen years. For when a man is feeble in keeping the commandments of the divine law, which are 10 in number, and is weak in his hope of the eighth age, the age to come, it can be said that he has been bent over for ten and eight years. Is not that man indeed *bent over* who is attached to the earth, and who always sins in disregard of the commandments, and who does not look for the age to come? But the Lord heals such a soul on the sabbath in the assembly of the synagogue. For when a man assembles together within himself thoughts of confession (Judah means “confession”) and keeps him, not only by word when He says to him, *Thou are loosed from thine infirmity*, but also by deed. For when He has placed His hands on us, He requires that we accept the energy from His divine hands to do in collaboration with Him the works of virtue. We must not be satisfied to receive only that healing which comes by word and by instruction.

From Explanation by Blessed Theophylact of the Gospel According to Luke, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, pp. 169.170. [Note: A very nice biography of Archbishop Theophylact can be found at http://www.chrysostompress.org/theophylact_of_ochrid.html]

Suffering and Illness III: Blessed Theophylact

For the Sunday of the Paralytic, 3rd Sunday After Pascha

Commentary on Gospel of John 5:1-16

from

Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to John

by Blessed Theophylact

Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, pp. 81-85, 2007.

Concerning the paralytic who was infirm thirth-eight years.

John 5:1-4: After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blink, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.

There was a feast of the Jews--Pentecost, I believe. The Lord went up on this feast for two reasons. First, to celebrate with the others lest His absence be interpreted as opposition to the law. Second, to use the occasion of the feast to draw more people to Himself by His signs and teaching, especially from among the guileless multitude, such as the farmers and the city craftsmen, who on other days were occupied with their work. The pool was called Sheep's Pool because the sheep intended for the temple sacrifices were brought there and their entrails were washed in its water. It was the common belief that the washing of the sacrificial entrails imparted divine power to the water, and that after the washing an angel would descend to the water to work a miracle. Here divine providence is plainly evident, guiding the Jews of ancient times toward faith in Christ by preordaining this miracle of the pool. God intended in due time to bestow Baptism, the greatest of gifts, making it full of power to wash away sins and bring souls to life. Therefore He prefigured Baptism in the Judaic practices of the Old Covenant by directing the Jews to use water for cleansing from defilement. This water did not cleanse the

fundamental stain of sin. It merely granted them purification from the pollutions they believed occurred on various occasions in the course of everyday life, such as contact with a leper or a corpse. Similarly God worked this miracle at the pool to prepare the Jews to receive the grace of Baptism. An angel would come down at certain times to trouble the water and infuse it with healing power. Water itself has no power to heal--if it did, it would heal everywhere and on every occasion. This miracle was accomplished entirely by the activity and divine energy of the angel. Likewise with us. In Baptism, ordinary water by the divine invocations receives the grace of the Holy Spirit and cleanses us from spiritual disease. The water of Baptism heals all: the blind, whose spiritual eyes are darkened and cannot distinguish good from evil; the lame, who are paralyzed and neither practice virtue nor make any spiritual progress; and the withered, who are in complete despair because of their inability to accomplish anything good. In former times infirmity prevented many from being healed in the waters of the pool, and only one was made whole. But now, what hinders any man from being baptized? If the whole world approached at once for Baptism, its grace would not be diminished.

John 5:5-7: And a certain man was there, who had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, He saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The paralytic answered Him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.

The perseverance of the paralytic is astounding. For 38 years he lay there waiting, each year hoping to be healed. But every time, those who were stronger and quicker got to the water before him. Yet he never despaired. The only purpose of the Lord's question--Wilt thou

be made whole? --was to reveal the paralytic's patient and steadfast endurance. What sick man would not want to be healed? And indeed, the paralytic answers gently and humbly: "Yes, Lord,, I wish to be healed, but I have no man who can put me into the water." He does not blaspheme; he does not rebuke Christ for asking a stupid question; he does not curse the day of his birth as we often do, fainthearted as we are, when subject to a much slighter affliction than his. His answers meekly, having no idea to whom he was speaking, but hoping that Jesus would help him into the water. Note well that the Lord asked, Wilt thou be made whole? and not, "Wilt thou that I make thee whole?"

John 5: 8-10: Jesus saith unto him: Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the Sabbath. The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the Sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.

Jesus commands the paralytic to pick up his bed in order to confirm that the miracle was no illusion. Unless his limbs were truly firm and strong, the man would not have been able to carry his bed. The Lord did not require, as He did with many others, that the paralytic show faith before he was healed, for the man had never seen Christ work a sign. Whenever the Lord did require faith of those He was about to heal, He had already performed other miracles in their presence. See how the paralytic believed as soon as he heard Jesus' word. He did not hesitate and think, "He is mad! I have been here 38 years without being made whole, and now all at once He commands me to stand." Instead, he believed--and rose to his feet. The Lord heals on the Sabbath to teach men to see the observances of the law in a new light: that they honor the Sabbath by refraining from evil, not by resting. How could the law forbid one from doing good on the

Sabbath, when the law comes from God, Who is ceaseless in doing good?

John 5:11-13: He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk? And he that was healed knew not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed Himself away, a multitude being in that place.

One must marvel at the man's boldness. The Jews badgered him: "It is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed on the Sabbath." But he boldly proclaimed his benefactor: He that made me whole, the same said unto me, ...as if saying, "You have lost your mind and talk nonsense if you forbid me to obey the man who save me from such a long-drawn-out and grievous ailment." The Jews did not ask him, "Who is it that made you whole?" but, "Who is it that said unto thee, Take up thy bed and walk?" They blinded themselves to the miracle and were obsessed by what they considered a transgression of the Sabbath. Jesus conveyed Himself away for two reasons. First, with the healer absent, the Jews would be more likely to believe the man's testimony, because it would seem that he was simply telling what happened, and not attributing the miracle to Jesus. Second, the Lord withdrew so as not to provoke the Jews any further. He knew the mere sight of the object of envy is enough to ignite the flame of spite. He wanted the deed to be assessed calmly, on its own merit along. And truly, the more the Jews accuse, interrogate, and examine, the more swiftly travels word of the miracle.

John 5:14-16: Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. The man departed, and told the

Jews that it was Jesus, Who had made him whole. And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath day.

The Lord's words to the paralytic, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, confirm the truth of these two doctrines--illness in man stems from sin, and the punishment in hell is eternal. No one can now say, "I fornicated only for an hour; my punishment cannot last forever." Behold this man: his years of sin were far fewer than the many years of his punishment, which lasted almost a lifetime. Sin is not judged by how long it took to commit, but by the gravity of the transgression. We also learn from the Lord's words that even though we have already paid a harsh penalty for sins, if we defile ourselves again with the same transgressions, we will be punished more severely than before--and rightly so. If a man does not correct his ways after his first punishment, it shows he is insensible and contemptuous and must be dealt with more harshly. But why are not all punished in this manner? Many of the wicked are healthy and energetic, and seem to pass their days merrily. But this absence of suffering in the present life becomes the grounds for even greater punishment in the next. Paul confirms this: But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened, meaning in this life, so that we should not be condemned with the world [1 Cor. 11:32], that is, in the next life. The chastisements we receive in this life are mere admonitions; in the next life they are true punishments. So then, are all illnesses the result of sin? Not all, but most. The ailments of the paralytic, and of the man who suffered pain in his legs (as recorded in the Book of Kings [see III Kings 15:23]), were caused by sin. Other illnesses are given as a test or as a sign of God's approval, as with Job, whose virtue was revealed in his afflictions. Still others result from excess of various kinds, such as gluttony and drunkenness. Some have supposed that His words, Sin no more,

indicate the Lord's foreknowledge that the paralytic, would reveal Him to the Jews after meeting Him in the temple. But this interpretation is incorrect. For the piety of the man was obvious from the very fact that the Evangelist says, Jesus findeth him in the temple. Had he not been pious, he would have run home to escape the intense interrogation by the Jews and given himself over to eating, drinking, and relaxation. But none of these temptations kept him from the temple. When he recognizes Jesus, he gratefully proclaims Him to the Jews. Instead of trying to mollify them by saying, "It was Jesus Who made me whole." Such gratitude infuriated them for they regarded healing on the Sabbath to be a violation of the law. Although the Jews subsequently persecuted the Lord, the man did not sin by revealing Him to them. He sincerely proclaimed his Healer in order to draw others to Christ. If the Jews chose to persecute his Benefactor, that was their sin. Now we should understand the Sheep's Pool to represent the grace filled waters of Baptism, in which the Lord Jesus--the Sheep sacrificed for us--was washed on our behalf by John. The pool has five porches, symbolizing the four cardinal virtues [courage, prudence, righteousness, and self-control] plus the divine contemplation of dogma, which are revealed in Baptism. Human nature was paralyzed in all its spiritual powers and lay sick for thirty and eight years. It was not sound in its faith in the Holy Trinity [three], nor did it believe firmly in the coming of the eighth age [eight], that is, the general resurrection and the judgement of all who have ever lived. It could not be healed, for it had no man to put it into the pool: the Son of God alone could heal our human nature by Baptism, was not yet made man. But when He became man, He healed our nature and commanded us to take up our bed. This means we must lift up from the earth our body--weighed down by the flesh and earthly cares--and make it light and free. We must rouse it from slothfulness so that it can walk, that is to say, be active in doing good. The troubling of

the water in the pool, denotes the evil spirits stirred up in the waters of Baptism and then crushed and drowned by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Like the paralytic, we too, are in need of healing, for we are paralyzed and inert in doing good. We also have no man, that is, no rational thought proper to man, that would distinguish us from the irrational beasts and bring us to the pool of tears of repentance. In this pool, the first to enter is healed: if he procrastinates and does not swiftly repent, he obtains no healing. Be quick to enter, lest death overtake you. Again, there is an angel which troubles this pool of repentance--the Angel of Great counsel of the Father [see Isaiah 9:6, Septuagint], Christ the Savior. Unless the divine Word touches our heart and troubles it with the thought of torments in the age to come, this pool will not be made active by divine power, and there will be no healing for the paralyzed soul. The pool of repentance may rightly be called the Sheep's Pool: the pool in which the inward parts and thoughts of the saints, like the sheeps' entrails, are washed. Cleansed in it, that is, rendered innocent and guileless, the saints are made ready to become a living sacrifice pleasing to God. May we also obtain healing, and afterwards may the Lord ever find us in the temple unstained by evil thoughts, lest a worse thing, eternal punishment, come unto us.