

THE LORD'S CHASTENING HAND

Saturday, September 5, 1964. I was to conduct a wedding that afternoon, so I retired to my study to arrange final details for it, and to complete preparation for the following day's ministry at Charlotte Baptist Chapel.

Suddenly as I was writing, I lost control of my hand. It wandered all over the paper. I called out to my wife; but in a few moments I had lost my speech, my right side was paralyzed, and I found myself unable to walk. I was put to bed, and the doctor was called immediately.

I had little doubt as to what had happened, and he confirmed the verdict. It was a cerebral hemorrhage. A main artery taking blood to the brain had snapped. He said I was a "very lucky man," because the hemorrhage had stopped just in time. Had it gone a fraction further it would have proved fatal. He suggested that I should forget any work, and take life gently. If I were prepared to do this, he told me, I could expect to live until I was ninety. If, however, I insisted on going back into the harness, he thought I would probably have five years, possibly ten, but would most unlikely to make seventy.

Medically, therefore, I knew the worst, and was left to go through the slow process of convalescence. In an illness of this kind one's inner defenses are knocked down physically, mentally, and spiritually. I was reduced to childhood. Physically I could only walk with difficulty; mentally I found it impossible to concentrate or think clearly; spiritually I found that I could not pray or read my Bible. It was indeed a dark, grim experience.

I confess my reactions to the illness were not the most spiritual. We often say from the pulpit, "We should never ask why in such an experience-only what?" Not "Why had God allowed this?", but "What lessons can I learn from it?" I am afraid I found myself asking why very often. Why had God allowed this to happen to me in the midst of a busy life, and so early in a new pastorate, when He was apparently giving real blessing and the church was filled twice each Sunday?

These and other questions constantly entered my mind. I sank to depths of despair beyond description. For days I could do nothing but weep. At this time someone wrote to me saying that if only I had enough faith I could be healed immediately. I must confess such comments gave me little comfort. I did not question God's ability to work a miracle in this dramatic way, but there came into my mind the query, "Have I any right to expect Him to reverse the laws of nature, which He Himself created, simply for my benefit?"

I found myself being attacked by tremendous temptation such as I had not known for twenty years or more. It seemed the devil took advantage of my helplessness to throw everything he had at me. Sinful thoughts, temptation to impurity, bad language were all the shattering experiences of those days. My wife and family suffered from having a husband and father who had reverted to childhood.

After weeks of darkness and complete despair, I remember one day crying out to God, "O Lord, deliver me from this attack of the devil. Take me right home! I would rather be in heaven

than stay here any longer and know that the last memory my family would have of me would be a man living like a cabbage. Please get me out of this situation.!"

It was then, the first time for months, that it seemed the Lord drew very near to me, although He was near all the time, even if I was unconscious of the fact. I had no vision of Him, nor any dramatic touch of healing, but I do know that a deep conviction came to my heart in which He said, "You have this all wrong. The devil has nothing whatever to do with it. It is me, your Savior, who has brought this experience into your life to show you two things."

"First, this is the kind of person, with all your sinful thoughts and temptations, which you thought were things of the past, but you always will be, but for My grace. I have never intended to make you a better man. In the second place, I want to replace you with Myself, if you will only allow me to be God in you, and admit that you are a complete failure, and that the only good thing about Alan Redpath is Jesus."

That, of course, was a truth which I had known in theory, and indeed had preached for some years, but now I know it in experience. "I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn, I can't make myself do right. I want to but I can't" (Romans 7:18, The Living Bible). How that verse has lived in my life in a new way that day and ever since!

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*Taken from the book, **My Greatest Moment***
***with God.** By Raymond Edman*