

Dr. Boice's Testimony

Dr. James Montgomery Boice gave this testimony May 7, 2000, after learning of his cancer diagnosis, speaking to the congregation at Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia. He passed away on June 15 of that year.

I do want to bring the call to worship this morning. But before I do that, I thought you might be interested—and it might be helpful to all of us—if I took a moment to fill you in on some of these medical problems. There are several reasons for that. You need to know it, and I covet your prayers. But also all kinds of rumors have been circulating around and, in fact, around the world. We're getting e-mail from practically everywhere, and some of the reports are quite bizarre.

Let me just give you a summation of what has happened. I had been feeling quite good until recently. But about the time of the PCRT's, I was not feeling well. And when I came back from Chicago, I went to the doctor and had a number of tests. And the bottom line of that is that they diagnosed liver cancer.

Then it takes a little while to figure out exactly what kind of treatment you need. I have consulted a number of eminent physicians—C. Everett Koop, of course, who has been a family friend for at least 30 years, another man at Mayo Clinic, who providentially had come through here to meet me just a few weeks before. He's the man that screens everything out there and gets patients into the hands of the specialists. So I feel that I have very good guidance, and the bottom line of the treatment is that I'm at Fox Chase Cancer Center. I'm in the care of a man named Dr. Paul Engstrom. And what I am receiving at the moment, beginning last Thursday, is standard chemotherapy for cancer. It's hard to tell where that comes out. Liver cancer is a very serious thing. They do get response from treatment in a percentage of cases, but it's relatively small. And as far as I can tell, we're doing the best thing we can.

A number of you have asked what you can do, and it strikes me that what you can do, you are doing. This is a good congregation, and you do the right things. You are praying certainly, and I've been assured of that by many people. And I know of many meetings that have been going on.

A relevant question, I guess, when you pray is, pray for what? Should you pray for a miracle? Well, you're free to do that, of course. My general impression is that the God who is able to do miracles—and he certainly can—is also able to keep you from getting the problem in the first place. So although miracles do happen, they're rare by definition. A miracle has to be an unusual thing.

I think it's far more profitable to pray for wisdom for the doctors. Doctors have a great deal of experience, of course, in their expertise, but they're not omniscient—they do make mistakes—and then also for the effectiveness of the treatment. Sometimes it does very well and sometimes not so well, and that's certainly a legitimate thing to pray for.

Above all, I would say pray for the glory of God. If you think of God glorifying himself in history and you say, where in all of history has God most glorified himself? He did it at the cross of Jesus Christ, and it wasn't by delivering Jesus from the cross, though he could have. Jesus said, "Don't you think I could call down from my Father ten legions of angels for my defense?" But he didn't do that. And yet that's where God is most glorified.

One other thing many of you have done has been sending cards, and I want to say how much I appreciate that. My wife and I have been reading them all. There are far more than I would ever have believed could come. One person in the church said that he has taken out a special prayer concern for the postman that delivers the cards that he won't develop a hernia, and I think that's thoughtful. Many prayers should be made along that line.

I think, although I want to assure you that I'm reading the cards, I don't envision ever being able to answer them all. And then some of you who are in a position to do so have said, "We would like to be of help in any way we can." And many have been already. Again, we're overwhelmed with offers. We'll never be able to take advantage of them all, but we appreciate all of those offers.

If I were to reflect on what goes on theologically here, there are two things I would stress. One is the sovereignty of God. That's not novel. We have talked about the sovereignty of God here forever. God is in charge. When things like this come into our lives, they are not accidental. It's not as if God somehow forgot what was going on, and something bad slipped by. It's not the answer that Harold Kushner gave in his book, *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*. God does everything according to his will. We've always said that.

But what I've been impressed with mostly is something in addition to that. It's possible, isn't it, to conceive of God as sovereign and yet indifferent? God's in charge, but he doesn't care. But it's not that. God is not only the one who is in charge; God is also good. Everything he does is good. And what Romans 12, verses 1 and 2, says is that we have the opportunity by the renewal of our minds—that is, how we think about these things—actually to prove what God's will is. And then it says, "His good, pleasing, and perfect will." Is that good, pleasing, and perfect to God? Yes, of course, but the point of it is that it's good, pleasing, and perfect to us. If God does something in your life, would you change it? If you'd change it, you'd make it worse. It wouldn't be as good. So that's the way we want to accept it and move forward, and who knows what God will do?

I do want to say one thing about my symptoms. My chief symptom is fatigue. I'm very, very tired. And what I'm trying to do is retain as much strength as I can. And the reason I mention that right now is that I'm going to slip away during the middle hymn and go home. So if I do that, don't think, "He's passing out." It's something that has been planned beforehand.

Now our call to worship: I'm going to read from 1 Chronicles chapter 16: "Sing to the Lord, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among the peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy is his dwelling place. Ascribe to the Lord, O family of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength, ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him and worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness. Tremble before him, all the earth!"