

# The Great Physician

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[ 0 : 00 ] Throughout the Bible, we're given many wonderful pictures of Jesus and his mission. He is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. He is the glorious Messiah who triumphs over death and the grave.

In Luke chapter 5 and verses 27 through 32, he is the great physician who heals the sick and calls them to repentance.

Now, we're all familiar to one extent or another with medical doctors. And in this passage, Jesus compares himself to a doctor whose compassion and skill shine the brightest when he's dealing with the darkest of diseases.

Luke, who wrote this gospel, was himself a doctor. And so perhaps this was his own personal favorite picture of his master, Jesus, the great physician.

Jesus says, Now, he says this in the context of having called a tax collector.

[ 1 : 19 ] called Levi to follow him and then attending a meal where there are many other tax collectors present also. Jesus is practicing his trade as the great physician among those who recognize their need of his healing compassion and his skill.

As we study this passage together this morning, let's ask ourselves whether we recognize our need of Jesus' healing compassion and skill.

Not necessarily that any of us are emotionally or physically unwell, but that before God we are sick with a more serious disease altogether, that of sin, shame, and guilt.

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our supreme concern.

Amen. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. We want to consider two basic things from Luke 5, 27 through 32. The cure of Jesus and the casebook of Jesus.

[ 2 : 36 ] The cure of Jesus and the casebook of Jesus. I invite you to enter into this passage and find yourself among one or other groups of people. Those who are sick and know it, in which case Jesus is for us.

Or those who are sick and don't know it, in which case no matter how great a physician Jesus is, he cannot help us.

First of all then, the cure of Jesus. The cure of Jesus. This passage is the third of three accounts of Jesus' healing miracles. The first deals with Jesus' healing of a leper, in which he deals solely with the man's physical sickness.

The second deals with the healing of a paralyzed man, where he deals with both the man's physical condition and his spiritual sickness. The third deals with Jesus' healing of a tax collector, where he deals solely with the man's spiritual sickness.

So there's a progression in these miracles in Luke. The great physician moves from symptom to cause, which all good doctors do. Physical only, to physical and spiritual, to spiritual only.

[ 4 : 00 ] Now on the surface, there's nothing wrong with Levi, nor with any of the other tax collectors. They were healthy. By all accounts, collecting taxes could make a man very rich.

He was hated by his countrymen, because tax collectors weren't always scrupulously honest to the taxes they collected. Likewise, they were labeled as collaborators with the Romans.

But for all that, there appears to be nothing physically wrong with Levi. And yet, it is for him Jesus has come. And of him, Jesus says, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. So what is the sickness Jesus has come to heal in Levi?

And what is Jesus' cure? In both verse 30, from the mouth of the Pharisees, and verse 32, from the mouth of Jesus himself, we are told, Sin.

[ 5 : 07 ] Sin. Sin. These tax collectors are sinners. They are socially and religiously unclean. They are thieves, extortioners, collaborators, and traitors.

They are outside the pale of what it means to be a faithful Jew. They are outcasts. They are sinners. And if Jesus is a faithful Jew, he shouldn't be associating with people like that either. So there's a social problem here, as far as the Judaism of the day saw it. You were either in or out, and this tax collector was most definitely out. He was a sinner.

But more importantly, as far as we're concerned, there's a spiritual problem. Levi's relationship with God was broken and ruined.

He was probably an above-average wealthy man. He was physically healthy. He would have had a nice home. But for all that, he was guilty before the eyes of a God who can see through the appearances of a man straight into his heart.

[ 6 : 23 ] Levi's heart was darkened. His spirit was dead. Although God knew him, he did not know God. Levi was guilty before God, a sinner deserving of the judgment of God on account of all the wickedness of his heart, a man whose darkened heart was an offense to the purity of heaven's light.

He may have been an outcast from Jewish society, but worse still, he was an outcast from God, alienated from God through his own sin, guilt, and shame.

Many in the Israel of the day, including the Pharisees, were not outcasts from Jewish society. They were very much the in crowd. But they were no less outcasts from God.

The apostle Paul puts it like this, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That word all is such an uncomfortable word, especially if we should tend toward the religion of the Pharisees.

You don't need to convince Levi that he's a sinner. He knows it. But no matter how hard you tried, you could not have convinced the Pharisees of their guilt before God because all they do is justify themselves on the basis of their works, righteousness, and religious ceremonies.

[ 7 : 53 ] Nevertheless, all have sinned, every one of us, every member of the human race. However good we've been, however bad we've been, however religious we've been, however non-religious we've been, we're all sinners, and therefore all of us, according to Jesus' definition, are desperately sick and in need of the cure only he can offer.

Jesus proceeds to point out the cure, his call to repentance, his invitation to change, his offer of transformation.

We'll see more about that in a moment through the worked example of Levi's life change and repentance. But in a nutshell, repentance is a change of direction, a turning around.

It literally means metanoia to change one's thinking, to change one's mind. By nature, we justify ourselves before God, every one of us, and say, I am in the right, and if God thinks I'm in the wrong, then he's in the wrong.

Repentance changes our minds so that now we say, I'm in the wrong, and God is in the right. It's a change in direction from life going our own way to going God's way instead.

[ 9 : 25 ] It's not a spring clean of our lives. It's not just a change in our external behavior. It's a complete transformation of who and what we are.

It begins on the inside. It takes hold of our hearts and our minds, and only then does it migrate to the outside. That's the cure Jesus calls us toward.

Repentance, heart change, transformation, dethroning ourselves and all our idols, and enthroning Jesus in our hearts as Lord. We talk about some cures as being kill or cure.

The cure Jesus calls us to take is to kill our old self with its selfishness, sinfulness, and worldliness, and to live afresh in him.

Now, we're going to encounter this word repentance rather frequently as we work our way through Luke Acts because it forms a center point of apostolic preaching.

[ 10 : 35 ] It's our reasonable response to the coming of Christ among us, his death on the cross, his resurrection on the third day. Nothing has changed. Christ calls all of us here to repentance, He invites our change.

He offers us transformation. And the question for us is this, are we willing to take the great physician at his word? Are we willing to swallow his medicine?

The cure of Jesus. Second, the casebook of Jesus. The casebook of Jesus. Because every doctor's got a casebook, even if it's not written down.

He or she remembers particular patients who've responded well to the treatments he or she offered. Jesus has a casebook running to millions and billions of ordinary people who, having recognized that they are sinners before a holy God, repent of their sin and follow him.

Levi is just one entry in that casebook. If you're a Christian today, then you also have an entry in Jesus' casebook. But let's briefly consider Levi as the model of what it means to repent and to accept Jesus' cure for our sin.

[ 12 : 01 ] First, Levi followed Jesus. And second, Levi gathered for Jesus.

Levi followed Jesus. Jesus, having seen Levi at his booth collecting taxes, calls out to him, follow me.

We read, and leaving everything, he rose and followed him. Just as in verse 11, the fishermen Simon and Andrew, James and John left everything to follow Jesus.

So Levi does the same. He leaves his tax booth and he follows Jesus. This language of following was used in the Israel of Jesus day to denote that someone had become a disciple of a particular rabbi.

Levi left everything behind to become a disciple of Rabbi Jesus. This is the first sign of what repentance in the life of Levi looked like.

[ 13 : 08 ] He's not living for himself anymore. He's following Jesus. And at its simplest level, this indicates for us that repentance means a change in priorities.

Jesus now comes first and the call to follow him is primary. Levi left his tax booth behind and put Jesus first in his life.

Repentance means a change in priorities. Jesus and his kingdom now come first. Everything else is relegated to a secondary position in our lives.

It doesn't mean that we leave our employment behind if we become Christians, but it does mean that Jesus is now more important to us than our employment. So, repentance and following Jesus means putting him first in our lives.

Tell me, is Jesus first in your life today? the love of Jesus comes before all other loves.

[ 14 : 26 ] The commitment to him is paramount. Yes, even if that should cost us dearly. Are we following Jesus? But then second, Levi gathered for Jesus.

Levi gathered for Jesus. If the first sign of repentance in the life of Levi was personal change, the second sign was public change. He invited all his friends to a banquet where he also invited Jesus. Now, as you can see from the passage, his friends weren't the elite of the Israel of the day. They were fellow outcasts, fellow tax collectors, others who were on the outside.

But such was Levi's enthusiasm for his newfound faith in Jesus that he laid on a lavish banquet at which Jesus was the head guest and to which he invited all his friends.

Well, as Levi previously had gathered taxes for the Romans, now he gathered disciples for Jesus. One sick man who had been healed of his illness is inviting his fellow sick friends to come and be cured from their illnesses also.

[ 15 : 39 ] Levi became the first tax collector to become an evangelist. Surely this is a sign that Levi has changed and is now putting Jesus first in his life.

He gathers for Jesus. When I became a Christian, I was advised to immediately tell someone. That's what you used to do.

Immediately tell someone that you become a Christian. It was a little nerve wracking when I told my mother I become a Christian. But I did it.

And it solidified my profession. In former days when someone became a Christian, they showed it by coming out to the prayer meeting. Can't use that phrase nowadays in context of a prayer meeting, but that's what they talked about.

he's come out. Levi has come out as a Christian and he's now hosting an evangelistic meal where his friends can meet with Jesus.

[ 16 : 46 ] Levi is gathering for Jesus as we believe he continued to do under the name Matthew who wrote a gospel for the rest of his life.

So the casebook of Jesus when it comes to Levi is composed of two entries. Levi followed Jesus, Levi gathered for Jesus. And the question for us all this morning is this, what does it say about us in the casebook of Jesus?

If it says about Levi, he followed me, he gathered for me, what does it say about us as individuals?

Well, as we close, allow me to offer some practical applications of this passage for us.

First, the call of the gospel is to engage. The call of the gospel is to engage. Doctor's surgeries aren't filled with people who are well, but people who are sick.

Doctors work with the sick. If you should come across a doctor, if you're fortunate enough to get an appointment these days, who says, I don't mind being a doctor, but I really don't like working with sick people.

[18:07] You come across a doctor who says that, you'd have to question his choice of profession. If she doesn't like engaging with sick people, she really should consider her career path. Jesus, the great physician, came down from the glories and holiness of heaven to engage with the diseased and the sick and the ill, or rather, as we've seen with those who know that they are diseased, sick, and ill.

And our call as followers of Christ is to engage with those who are diseased, sick, and ill. Our call is not to insulate ourselves from the pain of the world around us.

Our call is to get out of our Christian ghettos and engage, offering the cure of Christ's grace. And notice who it is who first engages.

Levi does not go looking for Jesus. Jesus goes looking for Levi. The same way we cannot wait for people in the streets around us to come into our church, we must take the initiative in engaging with our world.

Can you think of ways in which we can engage with those who aren't yet Christians? Ways in which we can take the first step toward them just as Jesus took the first step toward Levi?

[19:31] Are there clubs we can join in which we can engage with people who desperately need to hear the message of the gospel? I know someone among us, she's not here today, but she joined a toastmasters club giving speeches, learned to make speeches so she could meet new people and introduce them to Christ.

I know another person who is here today who joined a running club so that she could do the same. Are there concrete, solid ways in which we can engage with the Levi's of this world?

If there are, let's make definite plans to start because who knows what our engagement with them will lead. Second application, the call of the gospel is to associate.

Associate. It's amazing how often important episodes in the gospel take place over dinner. We dare not overestimate the impact that offering hospitality can make to our Christian witness.

Jesus' model of ministry in Luke 5, 27 to 32 is not hit and run. Listen to this very carefully. It is not hit and run. It is stay and associate.

[20:51] He is delighted to be invited by Levi to a banquet where Levi's friends have gathered. Jesus associates with these people.

He's come from heaven's glories, but he stoops down to bless Levi's unclean house with his presence. Just like I asked before, can you think of ways in which we'll not just meet, but associate with people who aren't yet Christians.

What does that association look like? It is not hit and run ministry, but in-depth, getting to know, stay and associate ministry.

It may take many years of engaging and associating before we will get an opportunity to share the gospel in words, but at least we will have shared it in works. I heard a statistic recently on UCB radio, United Christian Broadcasters radio, that in general it takes nine separate friendships with Christians to bring a non-Christian to faith in Jesus.

Nine separate friendships with Christians to bring a non-Christian to faith in Jesus. Now think of these friendships as links in a chain. There are nine links in that chain.

[22:11] you may be link one, and your only job as a Christian is to be the first Christian that person has ever met.

You may be link five in that chain, and your only job is to show that person the welcome and hospitality of Jesus. your job may be link nine in that chain, and your only job is to directly lead that person to a living faith in Jesus.

But we're all links in that chain, and I would say that from experience and by reflection, that the most important link in that chain is the person who was willing to stay and associate.

Link number five. Associate with the Levites of this world, and you are forging a strong link in that person becoming a Christian.

Third application, the call of the gospel is to resist. The call of the gospel is to resist. There will always be people who will criticize us for engaging and associating with those outside the church.

[ 23 : 34 ] Perhaps their complaint will be, you're not at every meeting the church organizes. And of course we can't be, because we need to give time to this higher calling of engaging and associating with those outside the church.

The criticism in this passage comes from the Pharisees, whose idea of holiness is complete separation from anything that might contaminate them. There is a place for complete separation unto holiness, but there's also a place for engagement and association in holiness.

Listen carefully to Kirk's sermon from a few weeks ago about being in the world. Get this right. holiness. In the world, for the world, and therefore not of the world.

Thank you. Holiness, true holiness, is not disengagement, but righteous engagement.

Doctors often do contract the illnesses their patients are suffering from, but they take wise precautions. They wear masks, they wear gloves, they wash their hands between consultations. In the same way, we take precautions when we engage and associate, one of which perhaps is to ask other Christians to pray for us.

[ 24 : 57 ] Another of which perhaps might be to remember at all times, we are ambassadors for Jesus. But having taken these precautions, we resist the call to become Christian hermits who are reclusive and have nothing to do with the world.

And if that means upsetting a few people in the church because we're not at every meeting the church organizes, then so be it. Without compromising in any way, let's engage with those who are sick in spirit, for in so doing, we're obeying our master's call.

Lastly, the call of the gospel is to offer Jesus. The call of the gospel is to offer Jesus. I'm sure that Luke, by virtue of him being adopted himself, loved this image of Jesus, the great physician, more than any other.

However, Luke was wise enough to know that though he could treat all manner of human sicknesses, only Jesus, the great physician, can deal with the greatest human illness and disease human beings have, their sin and guilt before a holy God.

the cure to Levi's problem didn't rest with Peter or John, but with Jesus. As we saw earlier, Levi invited his friends to come and meet with Jesus because he knew that he wasn't the answer to his friend's problems.

[ 26 : 27 ] Only Jesus was. Our responsibility and great privilege is to offer Jesus to people who do not yet know him, or rather, to bring them to a place where Jesus will be offered to them as the great physician who can make them well.

It is either ourselves to offer Jesus to them or bring them to a place where Jesus is offered to them. It is as the apostle Paul said, we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord.

To go back to the image of links in a chain, Jesus was number nine for Levi's friends. Levi was linked five.

Levi brought them to a place where Jesus could be offered to them his own house and he let someone else do the offering, Jesus himself. Again, can we think of ways to do that?

Or for us to bring people into a place where Jesus is offered. We can invite them to church. We can invite them to a meal in our homes to which we invite other Christians.

[ 27 : 39 ] But our objective is to bring that non-Christian person into contact with the great physician, Jesus himself, and let Jesus do his healing work in their hearts, bringing them to repentance and wholeness of life.

The thing is, there's many a broken heart in this world. And there's many a broken heart in this church. We have a great physician who has a hundred percent recovery rate.

The gospel writer Luke loved this imagery, and I invite you to love it as well. Healed from our sin, let this great physician heal everything else about us until finally we appear before him in heaven, whole, healthy.

One final question. What must we do to access Jesus' cure? What must we do to be healed of our sin, to be right with God and begin that process of repentance?

We come to him in faith. We hear his call to follow him issued even today in our ears. And we come to him believing that what he has done on the cross by dying to take away our sins, he's done for us as individuals.

[ 29 : 02 ] We come in faith, and by grace, we let the great physician make us well. We'll be right back.