

The Doctor who deals THE Disease

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[0 : 00] Well, sickness creates all sorts of problems, doesn't it? For some of us, like myself, I'm a terrible patient and so sickness makes me grumpy.

In fact, Michelle and I were not long married and I was sick, I needed minor surgery and when my parents came over to visit us when I was home, they noticed how grumpy I was and yet how patient Michelle was.

And since that time, they always refer to Michelle as the saint. But sickness creates other problems too, doesn't it? Like it isolates us and I think we've all had first-hand experience of that during COVID, haven't we?

Whether it's seeing individuals isolated or even whole states isolated in lockdown like last week. But it also stops us from enjoying life to the full, doesn't it?

You can't do what you'd like to do or go where you'd like to go. Either because you're just not feeling well or you're just not able to. And depending on your sickness, you need the right kind of doctor to deal with it, don't you?

[1 : 10] Which is sometimes why your GP sends you to one specialist and another specialist and another one and each one charges like a wounded bull. But sickness is only a symptom of the underlying disease in our world called sin, actually.

You see, sin has corrupted our creation such that there are natural disasters and various diseases like COVID. So people get sick usually not because of something they've done, but because sin has corrupted our creation.

And so we need a doctor who can reverse the effects of sin in our world and bring us into a new creation where there'll be no more suffering or sickness, just life to the full.

And yet sin has also corrupted people such that they act selfishly, whether on the roads or in the shops. I mean, can you believe that in five-day lockdown, some shops like Coles at Tunstall ran out of toilet paper again?

It was five days, people. Or as I've said before, you never have to teach children to be naughty. It just comes naturally, doesn't it? But our own sin separates us, and not so much from one another, but from God.

[2 : 24] And it means instead of life to the full and a new creation, we need to answer for that sin, which means judgment. And so we need a doctor, a sin specialist, if you like, who can deal with our sin and bring us to God.

And today's passage shows us that Jesus is that person. For we see three snapshots of people affected by sin, whether it's a corrupted creation that leads to sickness, like the leper or the paralytic, or whether it's a corrupted person that leads to selfishness, like Levi.

Jesus helps them all. In fact, in each snapshot, Luke highlights an aspect of Jesus. He records one group or person speaking other than Jesus just once to highlight some aspect of Jesus that shows he's the perfect sin specialist, the doctor we need to deal with the underlying disease.

And in each snapshot, we also see a response that we'd have to Jesus. Let me show you. So snapshot one, the unclean leper. Verse 12. While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy.

When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean. Now, this man, notice, is really sick.

[3 : 46] He is covered in leprosy. Here is a man suffering the effects of sin in a corrupted creation. And it separated him from society, actually.

In fact, the Old Testament law said on the next slide on the screen there, that anyone with a defiling disease, a skin disease like leprosy, must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkept, cover the lower

part of their face and cry out, unclean, unclean.

And as long as they have the disease, they may remain unclean. They must live alone. They must live outside the camp. Now, this may seem harsh, but calling out unclean, living outside the camp or the town, kept the disease from spreading.

It was the ancient form of hotel quarantine, without the hotel, of course. But despite being a safety measure, it still separates them, doesn't it? And not just from each other, but actually from God.

You see, the camp there referred to the Israelite camp as they travelled to their land of Israel. And in that camp on the slide, in the middle was the tent temple, the tabernacle where God dwelt.

[4 : 57] And the camps around the outside are the different tribes of Israel. And so God dwelt there in the middle. But because God is so pure, perfect and sinless, and then nothing impure, imperfect, or even touched by sin could come near.

Even if it wasn't your own sin, but just the effects of sin, like sickness. I mean, if you were to visit the queen or the prime minister, when you were sick, you wouldn't be allowed to, would you?

Even if it's not your fault, because of who they are. How much more so with God? And that's why they were to call out unclean, rather than, I'm sick.

Why the man here asked Jesus to make him clean, rather than make him well. And why our first reading involved sacrifices to become clean.

Because sickness is caused by sin in our world. And back then it separated you, not just from society, but from God as well. But notice this man believes Jesus can do something about it.

[6 : 10] He falls on his face and begs Jesus to make him clean, but is Jesus willing? This is the only time in this snapshot that someone other than Jesus speaks.

And the focus there is not on Jesus' ability. The man believes he has the ability. The focus is on Jesus' willingness. Do you notice? If you are willing, the man says.

And it's the right question to ask, I guess, because in the first century, in Jewish tradition, it said if you touched an unclean person, you would become unclean as well.

What's more, people didn't want to go near the people who had leprosy in case they got it too. I mean, we see that today, don't we? When you're walking down the street, how many times do you walk up to someone and you're expecting a smile or not, and they suddenly just give you a wide berth?

They don't want to get COVID just in case we've got it. But there was a third reason as well. And sadly, people who were severely affected by leprosy like this man were severely disfigured like that man.

[7 : 13] And so for these reasons, they were sadly shunned by society, labelled untouchable. No wonder that man felt isolated, rejected.

And no wonder this man asked if Jesus is willing, because quite frankly, no one else was. But Jesus is. Although Jesus could have healed him with a word, look at verse 13.

Jesus deliberately reached out his hand and touched the man. I am willing, he said. Be clean. Clean.

Isn't that a great picture of his compassion? His willingness to reach out and touch the untouchable.

And the great news, this is great news rather for us, because sin has made us unclean too.

And not physically or ceremonially, but spiritually. On the next slide, this is what Jesus said in Mark's gospel. He said, out of people's hearts come evil thoughts, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly.

[8 : 16] I mean, how many times have we envied or wished we had what someone else had? And all these evils come from an inside, and that's what makes a person unclean.

We may not think sin is all that serious, but it's made us even more disfigured in God's sight, even more unclean than that leper.

And yet Jesus is willing to reach out and to clean us. People sometimes ask why they should believe in Jesus. But given our uncleanness, given our disfigurement, the bigger issue is why should Jesus bother to reach out to us?

But he is willing. No matter how affected by sin we are, isn't that good news? It's not just, sorry, he's willing, and he makes the man clean immediately, did you notice.

He heals the sickness, reversed the effects of our corrupted creation. And so now this man can be welcomed back into society. Now he can come close to God as family.

[9 : 27] That's why Jesus sends him off to offer sacrifices that Moses commanded from our reading in Leviticus that may have brought us. And not because the sacrifices make him clean, but verse 14, go show yourself to the priests, offer the sacrifice that Moses commanded in our first reading for your cleansing.

Why? As a testimony to them, that is to the priests, to the people, that he is now clean, that he now can come back into society, that he now can come close to God as family, no longer separated. Jesus, though, tells him not to tell anyone else because Jesus primarily came to deal with this disease of sin rather than heal sickness. And yet this man, it seems, couldn't help it because, verse 15, yet the news about Jesus spread all the more so the crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.

But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. And here is the first response in our passage. People come to Jesus to hear him and be healed by him.

And again, this is the response we're to have, if not already. One that comes to Jesus to hear him and be healed by him. And not so much of physical sickness, though sometimes he does that too, but of the real disease of sin, which he always does.

[10 : 53] For he is willing. What's more, he is able. So snapshot two, verse 17. One day Jesus was teaching and Pharisees and the teacher of the law were sitting there.

They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus.

When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd right in front of Jesus.

Here we're told that the religious big guns come to check Jesus out. Perhaps the priests told them about the leper and they came to see Jesus.

Either way, they were listening along with the crowd. And interestingly, in verse 17, Luke mentions that the power of God was with Jesus to heal the sick. And behold, here comes a sick man, you know, paralyzed and lowered down on a mat in front of Jesus.

[11 : 58] For those who know what the houses were like back then, on the next slide, remember that they often had steps up the side, so that's how they got him up to the roof. And the roof was often flat.

It was a sort of outdoor alfresco dining area for them. And so they dug through the roof, which was straw to start with and then mud on top. And so it was mud tiles that they were digging through.

I mean, they're determined kind of friends, aren't they, when you think about it? They're the type of friends you want to have. The type of friends we should be. But here is Jesus with God's power to heal the sick and here is this sick man lowered in front of him and so naturally, we expect healing. Right? Wrong. Verse 20, when Jesus saw their faith, he said, friend, your sins are forgiven.

Say, what? I mean, we're so used to hearing this story, we forget what a shock that must have been and how much head scratching would have gone on. After all, surely this man's greatest need is to walk, is it not?

[13 : 03] That's why his friends brought him. That's what we're all expecting. expecting. But it seems Jesus thinks he has an even greater need. I asked my kids last summer what they thought their greatest need was and one of them replied, a swimming pool.

In their defense, it was a very hot day, but they couldn't see past their immediate need. And we can do that too, can't we? You know, our immediate needs often blind us to our most important needs. And our most important need, like this man says, Jesus, is forgiveness. Because sin is the real disease that separates us from God and that we're going to have to pay for if someone doesn't do something about it.

And so, which do you think the man needs most? To walk and enjoy life for the next 90 years or so in this world? I don't know how old he already is.

Or, to be forgiven and enjoy life eternal in the world to come. Jesus is dealing with his greatest need. And so, I wonder if Luke wants us to see that having God's power to heal is primarily about having God's power to forgive.

[14 : 21] Because that's the focus here. Verse 21. Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Oh, sorry.

Verse 21. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can, who is able to forgive sins but God alone?

Again, this is the only time in this snapshot that someone other than Jesus speaks and the issue is, is Jesus able to do this? Who do they think he is? Only God is able to forgive sins.

If the leper wanted to know if Jesus was willing, the Pharisees want to know why Jesus is able. For only God has the power or authority to forgive sins. But Jesus says he is able because he does have that power and he proves it.

Verse 22. Jesus knew what they were thinking and then he said verse 23, which is easier to say? Your sins are forgiven or get up and walk?

[15:28] Now that question which is easier is a bit of a trick question because you have to have God's power to do both. They're both is just impossible without God's power.

And so Jesus' point is if you're able to do one then you're able to do the other. Some time ago one of my daughters was not happy with me because I told her she had to go to her room.

She actually said you don't have authority over me. Apparently only her teacher did. When I said yes I do she said prove it. And so I picked her up took her to her room and plomped her down there.

Now that's not quite healing a paralyzed man I understand but the point is if I was able to do that then I'm able to have authority over her you see. That's what Jesus is doing here.

If he's able to do one he's able to do the other. Verse 24 I want you to know that the son of man Jesus has authority on earth to forgive sins so he said to the paralyzed man I tell you get up take your mat and go home.

[16:35] And immediately he stood up in front of them took what he'd been lying on and went home praising God. You see the point Jesus is able to forgive sins.

He's able to do one because he's able to do the other. Now I'm sure he would have healed the paralyzed man out of compassion anyway but the primary purpose here is to show that he has God's power to heal God's authority to forgive.

So he's able to deal with the real disease of sin and the response well we've already seen the man go home praising God and now verse 26 everyone was amazed and gave praise to God.

They were filled with awe and said we have seen remarkable things today. And again this is to be our response for since Jesus is able to forgive sins then we can be certain we're forgiven which means we can be certain we have a place in heaven that our loved ones who have already passed who believe are there now.

You see every other religion in the world says you have to earn your forgiveness or earn your way to heaven by doing good deeds or religious works but the problem with that is how do you know when you've done enough?

[17:49] You don't. So there's no certainty but if we have faith in Jesus like these men he says to us your sins are forgiven you are in the family you do have a place in heaven and the new creation for Jesus is able.

Now I realize for those of us who have been Christians for a while we we can take this assurance for granted can't we? But if we do then talk to those in our church who have been converted from another religion and we have a number who've converted from Islam to Christianity and talk to them and listen to them tell you how liberating how comforting this assurance is because in the religion they came from they never had it.

Realize what a great thing this is that we might continue to praise God like these people. And if Jesus is willing to cleanse and Jesus able to forgive then who do you expect him to come for?

Well sinners. So that's our final snapshot three verse 27. After this Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth.

Follow me Jesus said to him and Levi got up left everything and followed him. In the first two snapshots the presenting issue was sickness and the sick were brought to Jesus.

[19:19] Here however Jesus cuts to the real issue of sin and goes to a sinner a tax collector. And not that everyone who works for the tax office today are worse sinners even though most of us don't like paying taxes but in Jesus' day tax collectors were really dodgy.

They not only collected taxes from their fellow Jews for Roman enemies, they also overcharged their fellow Jews and pocketed the difference. In fact when tax collectors came to John the Baptist on the next slide to be baptized that's what John tells them to do.

You know stop overcharging collect only what you're required to collect. But because they did this then they were hated by their society and yet instead of shunning this overt sinner Jesus calls him to follow him doesn't he?

Jesus includes this sinner as his disciple. In fact it's likely Levi is also called Matthew who becomes one of the twelve apostles and wrote the book of Matthew in our Bible.

Either way Levi is over the moon because look at what he does in verse 29. verse 29 then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with him.

[20 : 37] Levi throws a banquet for Jesus. This person you see whom everyone was talking about called him included him as one of his disciples and in response Levi throws Jesus a banquet in honour.

But the Pharisees response is very different verse 30 but the Pharisees and teachers of the law who belong to their sect complained to his disciples. Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?

Jesus answered them it is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Again this is the only time someone else speaks in this snapshot the Pharisees and the issue here is Jesus' company.

A teacher like him should not be seen with people like them and yet Jesus says he's come for people exactly like them.

Just like a doctor seeks to heal the sick so Jesus came to call sinners. He is willing, he is able and he came for people just like them.

[21 : 54] Which again is great news for us because I'm sad to say that we are sinners too. But Jesus came specifically for people like you, for me.

We don't have to be perfect to be included, welcomed into God's family which is a great relief because we're not perfect. but we should be over the moon that Jesus would come for someone like us.

When Michelle's grandmother turned 90 she received a birthday card in the mail signed personally by the queen herself. She was over the moon. She talked about it for weeks and weeks.

Michelle's parents didn't have the heart to tell her that everyone who turned 90 got a card from the queen. But you see Jesus the king of the universe came to earth for people like us.

For little old me and you not only to call us but to die for us. That's a whole lot more than a birthday card isn't it? For his blood was the payment for our sin so that we could be cleansed, forgiven, no longer separated from God but welcomed into his family and with the certainty of life eternal in a sickness free creation.

[23 : 14] You see Jesus is the doctor you want to be healed of the disease called sin. He's the sin specialist for he is willing, he is able and he came for people just like us.

So how are you responding to him? For those who perhaps aren't Christian, perhaps tuning in online, then do you want to get better? Is the question.

If you do then like the first response we saw, come to Jesus, to hear him and be healed by him. Spiritually forgiven, cleansed, by believing in him, just like the leper believed, just like the paralytic's friends believed and had faith, trusted.

For us who already do that, then we're to praise God like the second response. We're not to forget how great forgiveness is and the assurance we have, but continue to praise God for Jesus.

And we're to be so thankful, we're to honour Jesus like the third response. Remember Levi was so thankful to be included, he threw a banquet for Jesus. Of course, we don't honour Jesus with a banquet, but with our lives, following his lead, reflecting his character.

[24 : 33] And if we find it hard, then remember the leper and how disfigured our sin made us before God, yet how willing Jesus was to reach out to us.

Remember the paralytic and our greatest need and yet how Jesus so ably met it. And remember Levi, how King Jesus would come for a person like him, like us.

I mean, that's a leader worth honouring, isn't it? I don't know if you've heard, but last week out of all the premiers, our premier was honoured with a nomination, the next slide, for a leadership award for the way he's handled COVID.

I'm not going to make any other comment on that, except to say that as well as you think or don't think he's done, there's another leader who's actually dealt with the disease behind COVID called

sin.

And so if people are willing to honour a premier who whatever you think has done okay with dealing with COVID, how much more so should we honour Jesus who's actually dealt with sin, such that we could be cleansed, forgiven, included now with the certainty of life eternal later.

[25 : 53] Let's pray we would honour Jesus with our lives. Let's pray. our gracious heavenly father we do thank you for the Lord Jesus, we thank you for this reminder of what we already know, that Jesus is willing, Jesus is able, and Jesus came for people just like us.

And so help us we pray to continue to praise you for him and to honour him with our lives. For we ask it in his name. Amen. Amen.