

The Doctor who deals THE Disease

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[0 : 00] I want to start by talking about the fact that sickness does create all sorts of problems, doesn't it? For me, I'm a terrible patient and it makes me grumpy.

In fact, it wasn't long after Michelle and I were married when I was sick and I had to have minor surgery. My parents came over to our place. They saw how grumpy I was, how patient Michelle was. And ever since that time, they always refer to Michelle as the saint.

I don't know what that makes me, but anyway. But sickness creates more serious problems, too, like it separates us. We've all experienced that firsthand with COVID, whether it's through individual isolation or statewide isolation, like the lockdown last week.

What's more, sickness 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 because either you don't feel well or you're not allowed to. And then depending on the sickness, you often need the right doctor to deal with the issue. And so you might have to go from one specialist to the other who, you know, charge you like a winded bull each time.

[1 : 13] Sickness, though, let me say the real problem of sickness is the underlying disease in our world called sin. You see, sin has corrupted our creation with natural disasters and various diseases like COVID.

So people get sick, usually not because of something they've done, but because of sin that's corrupted our creation. And so we need a doctor who can reverse the effects of sin in our world and bring us to a new creation where there is no more sickness, but just life to the full, where we can go where we'd like and do what we'd like to do.

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 at the start of our five day lockdown that Tunstall Square Coles ran out of toilet paper again?

Five days, people! No toilet paper. Oh, 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 also separates us, not from one another, but from God.

Because it means that we have to answer for those sins in terms of judgment. And so we need a doctor, a sin specialist, if you like, who can deal with our sin and bring us back to God.

[2 : 38] And today we've got three snapshots from Luke that tells us yet again that Jesus is that doctor we need, that sin specialist.

Because we see three people who are impacted by sin, whether it's a corrupt 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 is able to help them all.

In fact, in each snapshot, Luke records one other person speaking, apart from Jesus, which highlights an aspect about Jesus that makes him the perfect doctor, the sin specialist.

We also see a response in each snapshot as well. Let me show you from the text itself. So if you've got the Bible there, have a look at our first snapshot, the unclean leper and 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. And notice that this man is really sick, isn't he?

[3 : 53] He's covered, literally full of leprosy. Here is a man suffering the effects of sin that's corrupted our creation. And it's separated him from his society, actually.

In the Old Testament, there was a law which is on the screen that said, anyone with a defiling disease like leprosy must wear torn clothes that their hair be unkept, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, unclean, unclean.

As long as they have the disease, they remain unclean. They must live alone. They must live outside the camp.

Now, this may seem harsh to us, but it actually stopped this disease from spreading. It was the ancient form of hotel quarantine, if you like, without the hotel, of course.

But despite being a safety measure, it's still isolating, isn't it? And not just from each other, but from God. You see, the camp there referred to the Israelite camp as they were heading to their promised land of Israel.

[4 : 59] And on the next slide is a picture of the camp. And the big one in the middle, that's God's tent, the tabernacle. And the Israelites were camped around the outside. And so if you had to go outside the camp, you weren't just going away from people.

You were going away from God. You see, God is so pure, perfect and sinless that 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 in the world like sickness.

I mean, if you tried to visit the queen or the prime minister when you were sick, even if it's not your fault, do you really think you'd be allowed in? Of course not, 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 asked Jesus here to make him clean rather than make him well.

And why there were sacrifices involved in becoming clean, like we heard in our first reading.

Because sickness is caused by sin in our world.

[6 : 08] And back then it separated you not just from one another, but from God as well. But notice this man actually believes Jesus can do something about it because he falls on his face and begs Jesus to make him clean.

But notice what the man's speech highlights. It's not his, Jesus' ability, it's his willingness. Do you notice that? In verse 12, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

That's the willingness of Jesus that's highlighted here. And the reason for that is threefold. One is in Jewish tradition, if you touch someone unclean, you'd be unclean as well.

Second, you didn't want to get the leprosy yourself. You didn't want to get the leprosy. I mean, when you walk past people on the street today, I've noticed this walking up Doncaster Road. You kind of, you can't really smile at them.

You kind of nod your head. But then they walk all the way around because they don't want to get COVID just in case you've got it. But thirdly, leprosy, severe leprosy like this man disfigured a person like this man on the next slide.

[7 : 18] It made them hard to look at. And so sadly, these people were shunned and labelled untouchable. No wonder men like this or women or children felt isolated, felt rejected.

And no wonder the man then asked Jesus if he is willing because, quite frankly, no one else was. But Jesus is. And although Jesus could have healed him with a word, look at verse 13, which I think is a brilliant picture of Jesus's compassion.

And Jesus, what did he do? Reached out his hand and touched the man. I am willing, he said.

Be clean. And immediately the leprosy left him. What a picture of compassion, isn't it? Jesus is willing. And it's great news for us because sin has made us unclean too.

Not physically or ceremonially, but spiritually. On the next slide, Jesus said this. He said, out of a person's heart come evil thoughts.

[8 : 27] Envy. We've all envied. Slander. We've all said bad things about others. Arrogance. Folly. All these evils come from inside and make a person unclean.

We may not think sin is that serious, but it's actually made us even more disfigured in God's sight than the man with leprosy. And yet Jesus is willing to reach out to us.

To cleanse us. People, sometimes non-Christian people, want to know why they should believe in Jesus.

But if we understand our uncleanness, the question really is, why would Jesus want to reach out to us? But he's willing. And Jesus makes this man clean because he's willing and clean immediately, doesn't he?

He heals the sickness, reverses the effects of our corrupted creation. So now this man can come back into society. Now this man can come close to God as family.

[9 : 39] That's why Jesus sends him off to offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded from our first reading. Not because the sacrifices made him clean.

Interestingly, the sacrifices mention wood, hyssop, blood. Does it remind you of anything else? I'm not sure if this is a legitimate bow to make, but it's interesting.

Now we know Jesus' sacrifice at the cross is what's going to make him clean. But rather verse 14, Jesus says to go to show the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing as a testimony to the priests, to the people that you are already clean by Jesus.

And so now he's no longer to be separated from others nor from God. But Jesus also told him not to tell anyone else because Jesus primarily came to deal with the disease of sin rather than heal sicknesses.

And yet it seems this man couldn't help it because verse 15, the news about him spread, that he's about Jesus, spread all the more. So the crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.

[10 : 48] But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Here is the first response of our passage. People come to Jesus to hear him and to be healed by him.

And that's the first response we're to have, if not already. One that comes to Jesus to hear him and to be healed by him. Not so much of physical sickness, though he sometimes does that now, though he never promises to always do it.

But he does promise to always heal us of the real disease, sin. For he is willing. What's more, Jesus is also able.

So that's snapshot to verse 17. One day Jesus was teaching and Pharisees and teachers 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 a mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

[12 : 03] We don't know if it's because the priests saw the leper cleansed and heard it was Jesus and they told the Pharisees and word got out. We don't know what the reason was, but it seems the big guns, the religious big guns gathered from everywhere to check out Jesus.

And they're listening along with this crowd. And interestingly, in verse 17, Luke tells us that the power of God was with Jesus to heal the sick. And behold, here comes a sick man, paralyzed on a mat, lowered right in front of Jesus.

Verse 19, remember the friends couldn't get to see him or so they had to take him up to the roof. Just a reminder, I think most of you know this, but on the next slide, the houses back then had stairs up the side.

That's if you're wondering how he got them to the roof. That's generally how they would do it. And the roof was flat. It was kind of like their outdoor living space. The roof was usually made of had beams of wood with straw and then mud on top.

And so it was mud tiles that they dug through. But either way, here is Jesus with God's power to heal the sick. And here is this sick person right in front of him.

[13 : 11] 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. I think we've forgotten what a shock this is. I mean, there would have been a whole lot of head scratching going on there.

After all, surely this man's need is to walk, isn't it? That's why his friends brought him. That's what we're all expecting. But it seems Jesus thinks he has a greater need.

I asked my kids last summer what they thought their greatest need was. And they said a swimming pool. In their defense, it was hot. But they couldn't see past their immediate need to see what their greater needs were.

And we can do the same thing, can't we? We can be so familiar with this talk of forgiveness that we forget it's actually a greater need we have than even to be healed of some sickness.

[14 : 18] Whether it's a sickness we're facing or a loved one's facing. But the real disease is sin. That's what separates us from God.

And that's what will lead to our judgment. We're going to have an answer for it. And so which do you think this man really needs the most?

Healing to walk so he can enjoy life for the next 90 or so years in this world? Or forgiveness of sins so that he can enjoy life for eternity in the world to come?

Which one? Jesus is dealing with his greater need of forgiveness. And so I wonder if Luke wants us to see that having God's power to heal is perhaps primarily about having God's power to forgive. Because that seems to be what the focus becomes. Verse 21. You see, they want to know who this guy thinks he is.

[15:38] And again, this is the only time Luke records words apart from Jesus's in this particular snapshot. And it highlights something about Jesus. If the leper wanted to know if Jesus is willing, the Pharisees want to know how can Jesus be able to say this?

And Jesus says he's able to forgive sins because he has God's power, God's authority. And he proves it. Verse 22. Jesus knew that they were thinking and asked, why are you thinking these things in your hearts?

Which is easier to say your sins are forgiven or to say get up and walk. Jesus' question here is a bit of a trick question because they're both really hard to do with a word.

You need God's power to say get up and walk or say your sins are forgiven. And so his point is really, if you're able to do one, you're able to do the other.

Some time ago, one of my daughters was not happy with me because I asked her to go to her room. And she actually said, you don't have the authority over me. They were her words.

[16:46] Apparently only her teacher did at that time. And when I said, yes, I do, she said, prove it. And so I went, fine. I picked her up, carried her room and plonked her down.

Now, I realize it's not a healing of a paralytic man. But you see, the point is, if I was able to do one, I was able to do the other. If I could put her in a room, then I had authority over her.

And that's what Jesus is saying here. Verse 24. But I want you to know that the Son of Man, Jesus, has authority on earth to forgive sins. So he said to the paralysed man, I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.

Immediately, he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. You see, Jesus can. He is able to forgive sins.

He can do one so he can do the other. Now, I'm sure he would have healed the man anyway out of compassion. But did you notice the primary purpose here was to show that he has God's power to heal, God's authority to forgive.

[17:53] Jesus is able to deal with the real disease. And the response, well, the man's already gone home praising God. And that's what we see in 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 have forgiveness. It means we can be certain we have a right relationship with God. It means we can be certain we have a place in heaven and then the new creation.

Every other religion in the world says you have to earn your forgiveness. You have to earn your way to heaven by doing good deeds or by doing religious works.

But the problem with that is you're never sure if you've done enough. Are you? There's no certainty. But if we have faith in Jesus like these men here, he says to us, he says to you, your sins are forgiven.

[19:02] You are in the family. You do have a place in heaven and the new creation where there'll be no more sickness or suffering. I realize for us who have been Christians for some time, we can take this assurance for granted, can't we?

But if we do, then why don't you talk to some people in our church who've converted from another religion? And listen to them. I've heard them speak about how freeing the Christian faith is, how liberating and comforting it is.

That it no longer depends on how good we are, but on Jesus who is able to forgive sins. Talk to them and remember that it's worth continuing to praise God.

Well, if Jesus is willing to cleanse and able to forgive, then who would you expect him to come for? Well, snapshot three tells us.

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.

[20 : 10] And Levi got up, left everything and followed him. In the first two snapshots, the presenting issue was sickness where the sick were brought to Jesus.

But here in the third one, Jesus cuts to the real issue of sin by going to a sinner like this tax collector. Not that anyone who works for the tax office are worse sinners than others. But in Jesus' day, tax collectors were really dodgy. They not only collected taxes from their fellow Jews for their Roman enemies, but they overcharged and pocketed the difference.

In fact, we saw that earlier on the slide there from Luke's gospel. When the tax collectors to be baptized by John, John told them to not overcharge, just to collect what was required.

But because they did that, like Levi, then they were outcasts. They were shunned. But instead of shunning this overt sinner, Jesus calls him to follow him. You see, Jesus includes this sinner as his disciple.

[21 : 15] In fact, it's likely that Levi is also called Matthew, who later becomes one of the 12 apostles and wrote the book of Matthew in the Bible. But either way, Levi is over the moon because look at how he responds in 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 them.

Do you see that? Levi is over the moon, so he honors Jesus with a banquet. For Jesus has called him, included him as one of his disciples.

But the Pharisees' response is to criticize Jesus, verse 30. They said to Jesus' disciples, they complained, saying, 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 speech other than Jesus is recorded here in this snapshot.

[22 : 23] And the issue is Jesus' company. A teacher like him shouldn't be seen with people like them. And yet Jesus says he's come for people exactly like them.

And just like a doctor seeks to heal sick people, you know, he doesn't reject or she doesn't reject sick people from the waiting room, accepts them in to heal them. So Jesus came to call sinners. For he is willing and he is able. He came for people just like them. And again, this is great news for us because, as we've already seen, we are unclean sinners.

But Jesus came specifically for people like you and me. We don't have to be perfect to be included and welcomed, which is a great relief because we're not.

But we should be over the moon that Jesus would come for people like us. When Michelle's grandmother turned 90, she received a birthday card in the mail, personally signed by the Queen of England.

[23 : 30] She was ecstatic. She talked about it for weeks and weeks, that the Queen would send a card to little old her. Michelle's parents didn't have the heart to tell her that the Queen apparently did this for all who turned 90.

But Jesus, you see, is the King, not of England, or not just England, but the universe. And he came to earth for little old you and me.

Not only to call us, but to die for us. For his blood was the payment for our sin, so that he could cleanse us and forgive us.

No longer separated from God, but welcomed into his family with the certainty of life eternal in the perfect creation later. And so Jesus is the doctor you want to deal with the disease, sin.

He is the sin specialist because he is willing he is able and he came for people just like us. So how are you responding to him?

[24 : 34] For those who perhaps aren't Christian, but are tuning in online or visiting us today, then do you want to get better? Then if you do, you ought to have that first response we saw, to come to Jesus, to hear him, and be spiritually healed, cleansed by him.

How? By believing, by trusting in him. Just like the leper did. And just like the paralytic's friends did. And for us who already have, then we're to praise God, as the second response we saw.

We're to praise God for Jesus and the forgiveness we do have. How often, when you say your prayers, do you thank God for forgiveness? You know, I thank God for prayers answered, but someone being healed.

I was praying for someone just yesterday, who, no, Friday it was, who had a PET scan about cancer, and the news came back that it was clear, and I was thanking God for that. And I often

forget to thank God for forgiveness, which gives us assurance.

You know, to thank and praise God for what he has done for us through Jesus. And the third response there, we're to honour Jesus like Levi did. And not with a banquet, of course, but with our lives following his lead, reflecting his character.

[25 : 53] And if we find it hard, then remember the leper and how disfigured our sin once made us in God's sight. Yet how willing Jesus was to reach out to us, no matter how bad the sin.

Remember the paralytic greater need and how Jesus was able to meet it, which means assurance for us. Remember Levi and how Jesus the King came for someone like him.

To include and to call. That's a leader worth honouring, isn't it? I don't know if you heard, but last week, out of all the political leaders in our country, our Premier was honoured with a nomination, on the next slide, for a leadership award, for his leadership with the COVID virus.

I'm not going to comment on that. I realise it's a contentious issue, but I just want to point out he's been nominated for a leadership award, but COVID's still here. I mean, despite what you think of how he's handling it, how much more so should we therefore honour a leader who has dealt with the underlying disease to COVID, called sin?

How much more so should we honour Jesus as our leader and King? Let's pray that we would.

Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we thank you for this reminder this morning of truths that most of us already know, but please help us to rejoice in them afresh, to remember and see Jesus as the sin specialist that we need.

[27 : 39] The one who is willing, the one who is able, the one who came for people like us. Help us to see afresh just how great he is, that we might continue to praise you for him and live our lives in honour of him.

We ask these things in his name. Amen.