

Sunday, January 29th sermon: "Jesus' Comfort for Sinners -- The God of All Comforts (Pt 3)"

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS,  
by John Pittman Hey

Mark 2:5-11; Ezekiel 34

Scripture teaches us that God comforts His people. The principal manner in which God's comfort is displayed, is that He takes away our sin, He pardons our iniquities, He clothes us in His righteousness, and He thereby makes peace with us forever.

Jesus healed many helpless people, and even raised some from the dead. But in all that, the healing was but a foretaste of the full comfort of God for us!

Christ intended far greater things: the saving of His people from their sins!

Ultimately, that would fix everything. Our sins are the ultimate source of all our troubles, and sicknesses, and heartaches, and death itself.

But Christ paid the penalty of justice for His people's sins, so that He might raise us up one day at the resurrection. Then, all our sinning and sighing will be over forever.

Jesus showed remarkable sympathy for His beloved ones. No greater example exists than His sadness over the death of His dear friend Lazarus.

Jesus groaned in His spirit when He saw His friends weeping at the death of Lazarus. Jesus wept in front of them, and they knew that He had loved Lazarus.

But the Lord's people had such a deficient grasp of the power of Christ over death! They thought that His powers were limited to healing living people, but once death took hold, Christ could really do nothing more.

Not only so, but Lazarus had been dead for four days! Corruption had set in, and his corpse had begun to rot.

But the glory of God was about to be revealed! Jesus would show His people that He has complete power over death itself!

And so, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, and many believed on Him after that.

However, Jesus described a far deeper problem for His lost people: they were faint, and lost, like sheep without a shepherd. This too moved Him to compassion for them. What was needed, from a human perspective, was more faithful believers to preach the Gospel of salvation by Christ to these lost people.

In this observation, Jesus was redirecting His disciples away from a focus on mere physical sickness, to the root of the problem: spiritual lostness, and the wandering of sinful men away from God through disobedience. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way!

But in Christ's compassion, He appropriates to Himself as Messiah the promises of Ezekiel 34. There, the priests and religious leaders are excoriated for being unfaithful shepherds, who have not sought out the lost sheep of Israel, or bound up their wounds, or fed them, or protected them from the wild beasts.

But God then promises He will gather His lost people, and do the duties of a shepherd to his sheep. Better still, God promises He will appoint Messiah to be that one, faithful, good shepherd of the Lord's flock, to seek them out, to rescue them, and to restore them to peace and safety.

This compassion is stark: rather than blame His people for their disobedience and lostness, the Good Shepherd takes upon Himself the exclusive responsibility to restore them, and to keep them!

Even more explicitly, in John 10, Jesus explains just how He will save His sheep: He will lay down His life for them!

Those sheep are only the ones His Father has given to Him! Nobody can believe on Jesus that has not been given Him by the Father.

And all those sheep rescued by Jesus can and will never perish.

No amount of mere physical miracles can save the Lord's lost people, because it is sin that is our root problem. "He was despised, and we esteemed Him not."

So as Jesus was performing great physical miracles of healing, He intended to do far greater than healing the sick.

When the lame man's friends let him down on a litter in front of Jesus while He was teaching, Jesus informed that man that his sins were forgiven him. Here Christ explicitly states man's critical problem – not sickness, not physical deformity, but rather spiritual death by sin.

Of course, the scribes sitting there were offended, because only God can forgive sin. And so it is, but they refused to acknowledge that Christ is God manifest in the flesh, and therefore He can forgive sin.

Jesus underlined His full power by pointing out that it's easy to tell someone their sins are forgiven, for who can tell if it's true? It's harder to raise up a lame man from his bed, because everybody can instantly see whether the power changes the man.

Then Jesus says, so that you can know that I have the power to forgive sin, I say to you, rise up and walk! And the man was healed instantly!

Jesus proves He can heal impossible physical sickness, and that He can forgive a man's sin also.

Just like Isaiah had foretold, Jesus would not merely bear our sicknesses and carry our infirmities, when He performed miraculous healings during His ministry.

But Jesus would go much further: He would bear our sins away from us in His body as a sacrifice unto God, to justify His people, and forgive us our crimes against God.

By doing so, Christ would bring to His people eternal salvation and everlasting life to all who trust in Him.

No wonder just before He went to the cross for us, John's Gospel records this truth: Christ loved us to the end!