

Chapter Three

The Healing Virtue of Jesus

Luke 6:17-19

In our last study we learned that Jesus, after spending a whole night in prayer to God, chose twelve of His disciples and designated them apostles; men uniquely called and equipped to represent Him as special messengers to the world. And what would their message be? Their message was that in Christ, God has reconciled the world to Himself and inaugurated a new creation, Jesus Himself being the firstborn of a new humanity. I told you these twelve men are elders of a reconstituted Israel, a people of God characterized by the moral image of Christ.

Therefore, the first principle of the Christian life is that a disciple is not above his or her Teacher; rather, “everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). The “North Star” of Christian discipleship is conformity to Christ’s own moral character.

In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis writes,

The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose.¹

Think of it! The whole universe was created to glorify the Son—in *humanity*. God glorified the Son by creating the human race to be the image of the eternal Son into all creation. The fact that Adam chose instead to glorify himself did not change God’s plan, and in Jesus, the last Adam, the divine design for humanity is fully realized (Hebrews 2:5-18). The redemption of humanity was inaugurated with the coming of Jesus, and those in Him are being conformed into His image. This glorious redemption will be fully realized when Christ returns, and all who are in Him will be forever perfected into the image of the Son (I John 2:28-3:3).

Once you grasp this glorious truth, this wondrous salvation, it is only natural to adopt a single-minded devotion to Christ; a burning passion to progress in Christ’s image (I John 3:1-3). Once the mind is illuminated to this reality life is deemed good only to the degree one is like Jesus. As the old hymn says, “the things of life grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.” On the other hand, a double-minded person will dismiss this teaching as too radical and narrow. But James warns such a person ought not to expect to receive anything from the Lord (James 1:7-8). It is one thing to be ignorant of truth, it is quite another to hear it and dismiss it (Hebrews 2:7-15).

Just hours before suffering on their behalf, Jesus told His disciples, “If you love Me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). The Lord Jesus made no provision for loving Him apart from obedience. But then He immediately promised them “another Helper,” the “Spirit of truth,”

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1952), p. 169.

whom He promised would dwell in them, *enabling them to do as He commanded*. “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” (v.16-18). You need not fear discipleship will be too hard, that is to say, you need not fear being left as orphans to do it on your own—He will come to you. Please try to sense the tenderness in our Lord’s words to you.

It is very important that you understand the divine design for humanity as realized in Christ before we proceed into the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20-49). Therefore, in today’s lesson, I want to talk with you about the healing virtue of Christ’s own character.

The Power of Divine Virtue

In today’s text, Jesus and His disciples descend the mountain onto a level place or a plain. There, a “great multitude of people” gather. Many of these people traveled significant distances to come to Jesus from as far south as Jerusalem, and all of Judea, and as far north as the coastal towns of Tyre and Sidon. Note also, they came to *both* hear Him and be healed of their diseases. Our Lord’s preaching ministry and healing ministry were inseparable. This is an important principle to remember: the teachings of Jesus are Spirit, and they are life (John 6:63); His words produce wholeness when understood properly. We ought then to run to hear Him, and thereafter, walk so as to obey Him. If hearing is not producing obedience, then we are not truly hearing (James 1:21-27). Healing and deliverance are inseparable from hearing and obeying (John 8:31-36).

Our text tells us those “vexed” (tormented) with unclean spirits also came to Jesus, and they were healed. All these people came to hear Jesus, to be healed by Him, and one more thing, they came “to touch Him.” To hear, to be healed, and to touch Him. This is a beautiful scene Luke is painting. And take careful note as to why these people sought to touch Jesus; “for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all” (v. 19, KJV). There had never been anyone like Jesus. He stood apart from all other men, and not as the Pharisaical separatists stand apart, hypocritically shaming and condemning others. No, no, Jesus stood apart from all other men because of His inherent virtue. In Jesus, all the goodness of God was revealed in human flesh for people to see and experience. How could you not want to be near Him, to touch Him, and to adore Him? I would have traveled any distance to get near Him, wouldn’t you?

Our Lord’s preaching ministry and His healing ministry were inseparable, as was His character. Preaching. Healing. Virtue. There were other teachers in Israel. There were other healers and even other exorcists. But no one displayed such purity of virtue. The Greek philosophers and Jewish leaders of the ancient world acknowledged the value of virtue, but none could truly realize it. The incarnate Son, Jesus of Nazareth, entered human history as the genuinely virtuous man. And this characteristic separated Jesus from all other teachers.

The Virtue of Christ Revealed in the Church

It is God's will that the beauty of Christ's own virtue be revealed in the life of the church, today. As Christ's disciples, we are to display the virtue of Christ within a morally decadent world. True Christian virtue is, of course, derived from the indwelling presence of Christ, alone. And where the beauty of Christ's virtue is revealed in the church, there is no need for slick marketing and celebrity pastors; instead, people will come to behold the glory of Christ in His people.

And this virtue of Jesus develops in us as a natural consequence of our single-minded devotion to Him, through the Spirit. When you spend enough time with someone, you naturally adopt that person's character and ways. This is true both in the positive and the negative. For instance, Paul warns the Corinthians, "Do not be deceived, 'Evil company corrupts good habits'" (I Corinthians 15:33). The reverse is also true: Godly company reinforces godliness. This is why sarcasm, resentment, gossip, sexual immorality, greed, and bitterness are to have no place among the people of God. We must experience the virtue of Christ in each other in order to rightly reveal Him to the world. So, then, Luke is placing a laser focus on the healing virtue of Jesus.

Now, parenthetically, I realize modern translations read, "power went out from Him." Technically, there is nothing wrong with translating the Greek word here as "power." But "virtue" fits better with the context.² This is what happens when technicians produce translations. A scholarly translation, while technically accurate, risks separating the power of Christ's ministry apart from the virtue of Christ Himself. The KJV translators are telling us the power of Jesus is not an abstract thing; it is power inherent in the divine virtue of Jesus that is on display. The big point here is this: the power of Jesus' ministry and His character are inseparable.

At the time of our Lord's ministry, the devil exercised power, and the devil's minions, the religious elite of Jerusalem, also wielded power over souls. But neither the power of the devil nor the religious elite held any virtue. There is nothing attractive in such power. But people traveled great distances to come to Jesus not only because of the power of His ministry, but also because of the beauty of His character. Tragically, many people in Christian ministry today claim to have power, but they display no virtue. Such people therefore have more in common with the devil than with Jesus.

What the translators of the King James Version are highlighting is the unique healing power of divine virtue. And isn't that what we want today? That is, Christ's virtue, and not just power for power's sake? Jesus healed these people not because He was seeking fame or

² *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* cites "power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature," as one meaning of the Greek word, "dunamin," versus mere "power" depending on the context of the passage. II Peter 1:3 reads, "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue." It is therefore my point in this sermon that divine power and divine virtue are inseparable. God only exercises power in keeping with His character, as did Christ during His earthly ministry. A truly powerful person therefore is also a godly person. This does not mean that there is not diabolic power, we see it every day. But it is Christlike power, and thus Christlike virtue that is to define the disciple.

personal glory from men, but because it was His very nature and character to heal desperate people. “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth,” Peter told the first Gentile converts, “with the Holy Spirit and power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38). What a beautiful description of the life and ministry of Jesus! And let me tell you plainly: there is little or none of this beauty on display in most churches today. We must repent therefore and do the first works that naturally flow from single-minded devotion to the beauty of Christ.

Jesus is not a Reluctant Healer

Jesus displayed the divine virtue to the world. This means Jesus did not view sick people as pawns in a power struggle between the forces of darkness and the kingdom of God. Theologians speak of the “attesting miracles” of Jesus, and by this they mean Jesus did miracles to attest to His deity. Once again, this is technically correct, but cold and sterile. There would be nothing virtuous in healing human sickness merely to attest to His deity; rather, Jesus healed precisely because He is a healer, meaning *it His inherent in His nature to heal*. And the beauty of that virtue attracted people from all over Israel.

And this is important to you because when you come to Jesus, you are not coming to a reluctant healer, but to a Savior whose very nature it is to heal. It is the virtue of our Lord’s very presence that heals you. Many know Jesus has the power to heal, but they lack faith in His gracious character. These people assume they are not worthy of His healing, and they fear Jesus agrees. But inherent in the power of Jesus is divine virtue. It is His virtue that heals you, not your worthiness. We have read of Jesus healing great multitudes of people, and not once did we read of Jesus asking if those people were worthy of receiving His healing touch. Not once. This fact itself, reveals the beauty of the divine virtue of Jesus.

A Fountain of Blood Healed

Later in Luke, there is another incident in which the healing virtue of Jesus is revealed. This involved the healing of a woman with a hemorrhage of blood. She had spent all her livelihood on physicians, and could not be healed by any (Luke 8:43). This was a desperate woman. She might have grown bitter and died a miserable death, except for the virtue of Jesus. Mark’s parallel account tells us this woman came behind Jesus and touched the border of His garment, for she said, “If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole” (Mark 5:28). She did touch his garment, and immediately the hemorrhage stopped. Mark writes, “the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague” (5:29).

The KJV then reads,

And Jesus said, “Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that **virtue** is gone out of me. And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was

healed immediately. And he said unto her, “Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace” (Luke 8:46-48).³

Did you catch that? “Daughter,” Jesus called her. Do you sense the virtue here? The moral excellence of our Lord and Savior is here revealed. “Daughter.” Jesus extended familial relationship to this woman. To the physicians, this woman was a patient. To Jesus, she was His daughter. Do you sense the virtue in Jesus’ words and actions? Not just power for power’s sake. Not just a display of power, for no one even noticed the healing occurred except Jesus and the woman. Do you have faith in the healing virtue of Jesus? Do you believe He can and will heal your life, from the inside out? Jesus is not a reluctant healer. You can trust the beauty of His virtue. And it is this virtue to which you are now being conformed.

The Beauty of Christ Revealed *in* You

The beauty of Christ’s virtue is to be displayed in His people—that means, you and me. Genuine Christian virtue has the power to transform, to heal, and to liberate. It is the necessary element in preaching, and sharing Christ with others. If people cannot see Him in you, they are not going to much interested in what you say about Him. This is especially true for children; if they cannot see or experience Christ in the parent’s character and manner of life, the child will have little interest in merely hearing about Christ.

The New Testament scholar and pastor, Gordon Fee, notes that Paul, writing to the Galatians, spoke of Christ being in revealed *in* him. The text does not say God revealed His Son *to* Paul, but *in* his new life and character, “that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.”

Unfortunately, despite what Paul says so plainly, this sentence has often been misunderstood to mean God’s revelation to Paul, rather than God’s revelation in and through Paul’s life and calling as an example of God’s grace in this regard. When that key preposition (Gk. *en*) is inaccurately rendered “to” (which occurs in several popular English translations) this rendering quite misses Paul’s concern in making this affirmation. His clear point is that he, the Christ hater, was not simply a recipient of that revelation but is himself Exhibit A of God’s amazing grace.⁴

What would happen if Christlike virtue were a requirement for all preachers, teachers, and Sunday school teachers? Paul said that God revealed Christ in him, so that he might preach him to the Gentiles. The Gentiles needed to see Jesus in Paul’s manner of life, and not just his preaching. The Christian leader is to lead by example, not just in word. I dare say if genuine Christlike virtue were a prerequisite for preaching, many pulpits would stand empty on Sunday morning.

³ Quotation marks were added to the KJV text here to enhance readability.

⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *Jesus the Lord according to Paul the apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2018), p. 8. The ESV and NRSV translate this important passage as “to” instead of “in.” One has to wonder why they would do this, unless, of course, it is easier for most preachers to boast of their knowledge about Christ, than to reveal Him in their character.

A Warning of Perilous Times

Virtue has fallen upon hard times in western society. We see little virtue in our political and business leaders, and who can count the numbers of scandals among celebrity preachers? The apostle Paul warned of perilous times to come in the last days, and he directly connected that peril to a powerless “form of godliness” (II Timothy 3:5). In other words, Paul understood the absence of a transformational gospel would create perilous times for all of society, not just the church. And we are in such perilous times. The salt has lost its savor, and the light of the gospel placed under a basket. Instead of making disciples, the church is doing something else. Instead of believers being conformed into the image of Christ, the believer is sold a false gospel that reinforces a self-centered, worldly, and superficial life. And as Peter warned, “the time has come for judgment to begin with the house of God” (I Peter 4:17).

Jesus warned of a day in which He would declare to very religious people, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matthew 7:23). That day is set, it is surely coming, and grows closer with each sunset.

But there is still time to revive genuine godliness in Christ Jesus. There is still time to recover Christ’s virtue as the norm for Christian living, beginning now. Christ’s healing virtue has not lost its power. Listen to how Paul describes this in his letter to Titus,

¹¹ For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works. ¹⁵ Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.

³ Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. ³ For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

⁸ This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. ⁹ But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. ¹⁰ Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, ¹¹ knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

New Testament Christianity is not merely about believing a set of propositional truths, but transformation from an ungodly life into participation in the healing virtue of Jesus. So then, what does a genuine godly life look like? This is where Luke is taking us as we begin in Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain. **AMEN.**

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