

Introduction

When those you love and care for hurt, it hurts you too. Last weekend, Melissa experienced terrible pain in her jaw. Turns out she has a cracked tooth and it had become infected. But while she was in pain and before we could get to the dentist, tylenol and ibuprofen became her dear friend. I could tell when the pain was at a high level and it made me hurt. I could also tell when the medicine was taking effect and I experienced relief. This morning we look at a man whose servant was in terrible pain, and clearly he felt that pain as well.

[Read Text; Pray]

The three miraculous works of Jesus recorded by Matthew in chapter 8:1-17 vividly illustrate his power over disease. But there is more. There is a clear connection in the Bible between sickness and sin. If there had been no sin, there would be no sickness. Disease and physical suffering are part of the curse due to sin. Death was not a part of life until the sin of Adam and Eve. And so Jesus' ministry of healing persons of disease is a visible testimony of his power to forgive sins and alleviate the damage and pain they bring. As we look this morning at the healing of the centurion's servant, we witness the "Authoritative, Pain-Relieving Power of Jesus."

We see, first, that it is made known through...

I. An Unlikely Convert

The unlikely convert in this passage is a Roman centurion. He was not a son of the kingdom. He was not a Jew. His position in the Roman occupational force would have made him detestable to the Jews. He was a soldier, a man not of peace but of the sword. He did not have the look or the position or the ancestry that Jews would have thought would make him the kind of guy who could be held before the world as a great example of pleasing God. But it is this man at whose faith Jesus marveled, extolling it as greater than any faith he had found in Israel.

Here is a warning to us that we never think we can gauge the spiritual interest of a person or the likelihood that they might come to Christ on the basis of who they are or how they appear or what their background might be. Be careful never to look at a person and think: well, they would never come to Christ. Never write people off because they are not like you.

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that God delights to save people of whom the world thinks very little. He has chosen the weak things and the things that are not to shame the things that exalt themselves in this world. I just want to encourage us at this point to spread gospel seed everywhere and let God do the work of grace as he will. Because Jesus has the power to change anyone.

Next, we see the "Authoritative, Pain-Relieving Power of Jesus" through . . .

II. A Paralyzed and Pain-Stricken Servant

The centurion appealed to Jesus on behalf of his servant. The actual Greek word refers to a child, a boy. Most likely here is the child of servants in the centurion's home. And he was in a very bad way. He was paralyzed and in great pain. The language here indicates suffering in its most extreme sense. The servant was overcome.

I mentioned last week how sin is to the soul what leprosy is to the body. And today I can say much the same about the consequences of sin. They are to the soul what the terrible disease of the servant was to his body. Sin produces a spiritual paralysis. Being dead spiritually is pretty much a paralyzed state. Our sin results in many pains in our lives. And, ultimately, sin results in eternal pain of eternal punishment. "The one who does not believe in the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). The Lord ultimately "destroys both body and soul in hell" of those who do not come to Christ. And right here in Matthew 8 Jesus warns of a cataclysmic destiny for unbelievers. They "will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." These words provoke images of extreme pain as when one is in torment and cannot bear it.

In this way the miracle of healing the suffering servant provides an illustration of the glorious truth that Jesus, by satisfying the wrath of God

through his death, spares those who trust in him from bearing that wrath on themselves for all eternity. Sin is hideous. The leper depicts that reality for us. But sin also calls for divine justice. It calls for being cast into the lake of fire where there is torment and pain forever. This is what is deserved by every sinner.

The people of this world downplay sin. And therefore, they downplay judgment. People do not like to think about judgment or torment being meted out on sinners. I don't like to think about it, but it tells me something of the wickedness of sin before holy God. In a world that sees everyone as basically good, the very idea that God is a righteous judge who inflicts unceasing tormentous punishment on the wicked is dismissed out of hand in prideful arrogance and ignorance. People who do not view sin as heinous do not believe in eternal torment. And people who do not believe in eternal torment do not take sin that seriously. But look at the pain and suffering all around us. Look at the suffering described in this text. Throgu earthly physical pain, God, at least in part, is providing warning after warning of an ultimate suffering the likes of which supercedes all of these.

Listen to the warning from Revelation 14:9-11 –

And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured out full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."

Hell is just as real and even more so than the worst suffering humans experience in their bodies now. Do not take it lightly. Do not presume you do not deserve it. It is divine justice for sin against God.

Next, we see the "Authoritative, Pain-Relieving Power of Jesus" through . . .

III. An Exemplary Faith

This outsider, this Gentile centurion, causes Jesus to marvel. He remarked, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith." What was so remarkable? Two things stand out.

A. First, there is a proper humility. The centurion says of himself, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof." He was seeking an act of mercy from Jesus. He was not seeking what he felt he deserved. Here is a centurion, and you could imagine how because of his position he might have felt worthy that Jesus should heal his servant. According to Luke, the centurion actually sent elders of the Jews to appeal for his servant's healing. And they contended that the man was worthy. They pointed out that he loved the Jewish nation and that he built the synagogue there in Capernaum. They reasoned, that Jesus therefore, ought to heal the servant because the centurion was worthy. He might also have felt he had the prerogative to demand that Jesus heal his servant. But no, he calls Jesus, "Lord" and he claims not to be worthy. He is unworthy but desperate. He knows and admits it.

There is no other proper way to approach the Lord. No one deserves God's mercy. The Jews got it so wrong and had a hard time ever grasping the reality of grace. But the centurion got it. Nothing that he had done could commend him to Christ. It is the same with each one of us. All Jews and all Gentiles are under sin, and our sin can earn nothing but death. We deserve from God nothing less than wrath. No one understands the gospel who comes to receive blessing from God on the basis of what he has done. The only suitable way to approach the Lord is the way this man did.

B. Second, there is a grasp of the sovereign authority of Jesus. The centurion explains. He knows how authority works. He operates within that system as a soldier and commander. He tells people what to do and they do it. He knows it is the same with Jesus. The centurion is convinced that if Jesus would but say the word, his servant would be healed. Now here is where I find myself going, "wow!" This centurion seems to have been what they called a God-fearing Gentile, like Cornelius. As the Jews testified that he loved the Jewish nation and that he had built their synagogue, it is not outlandish to think that he was aware of the teaching of the first chapter of Genesis. There God said the word, and it was done. God said, "let there be

light, and there was light." God said, "let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters . . . and it was so." "God said, 'let the earth sprout vegetation, and it was so.'" So the centurion communicates to Jesus, in essence, all authority is yours, you can speak to disease and my servant will be healed."

If only Jesus' disciples had that kind of faith! Soon we are going to be looking at how Jesus calmed the storm. When the storm suddenly blew up, the disciples were scared to death and woke him up. And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?"

What do you do in the midst of storms and in the midst of pain? The centurion is an example to each of us to humbly trust in the One who reigns in sovereign authority over EVERYTHING.

Next, we see the "Authoritative, Pain-Relieving Power of Jesus" through . . .

IV. An Authoritative Miracle

Jesus said the word. And the servant was healed at that very moment. The word was, "Go, let it be done for you as you have believed."

The centurion believed and Jesus worked mightily according to that faith. In his work we see Jesus' absolute authority, for it extends even to paralyzing and painful disease. If he wills, he can eradicate any and every illness, suddenly and completely. And by His death on the cross, he eradicates the pain and paralysis of sin. He works mightily in those who trust in him.

Finally, we see the "Authoritative, Pain-Relieving Power of Jesus" through ...

V. A Startling Lesson

After marveling at the faith of the centurion and in light of that faith, before effecting the healing, Jesus utters a breath-taking statement. It is actually not that shocking to us, but it would have been to the Jewish natives there in Capernaum. "Truly, I tell you [this is one of those – you-really-need-to-listen-to-me statements] many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Many outsiders (Gentiles from across the globe) will be inside and insiders will wind up outside the kingdom in the consummation. Inside the kingdom will be a glorious feast of the saints in fellowship and rejoicing with the patriarchs and of course with Jesus. Outside, the kingdom is the far reaches of darkness and doom. Outside there is torment. It results in weeping and gnashing of teeth. The extreme pain of the servant is a foreshadowing of what it will be like then for those who are thrown outside.

This brief statement is jam-packed. It speaks of the delights of heaven, of the miseries of hell, and of who is going to be where, and how they get there. It is striking that Jesus speaks of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They will be in heaven. Many of their descendants, however, will not be. Instead, Gentiles will be having a feast with them. You see the Jews believed they were going to heaven because they were Jews. They had the law. They were depending on whose descendants they were and on what they possessed. Jesus is declaring to them, "NO. It is not who your ancestors are. Coming into the kingdom is a matter of faith." It is not who your parents are. It is not whether you possess God's law. It is not whether you try really hard. The matter of entering the kingdom and reclining with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a matter of faith."

He heals by faith the one who is racked with paralysis and pain, but he commits those who will not trust in him to a place where paralysis and pain is all they will know for all eternity.

Conclusion

We have the joy of hearing from and baptizing three young ladies this morning, each of which has realized that coming to Christ for forgiveness of sins and for reconciliation with God and the hope of celebrating in heaven with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is a matter of personal faith in Jesus. Is it so with you? Jesus marveled at the faith of the centurion. He warned the masses because of their lack of faith. The stakes could not be higher. Interestingly there is another place in the New Testament which speaks of Jesus marveling. Mark 6 finds Jesus in his hometown of Nazareth. In Nazareth the people took offense at him. He only healed a few sick people. He could do no mighty work there. Mark 6:6 says "Jesus marveled because of their unbelief." This group of people had all kinds of advantage, but they

did not believe. Now, let me ask you, What does Jesus see when he looks at your heart today? Is he marveling? And is it because of great faith? Or is it possible that he marvels because of unbelief?

He has given you every possible reason to turn to him. If you are struggling in your walk with him, look to him with fresh faith. If you have never looked to him with faith, please, do it today.