

Introduction

This morning’s text is Matthew 8:14-17.

[Read Text; Pray]

Imagine what it would have been like to have witnessed Jesus as he exerted his sovereign power to bring about the instances of healing we have been reading about in Matthew 8. I mean just think when you go to the hospital for surgery for yourself or a family member. What a relief comes over us when we hear the good news, “they are out and everything went well.”

Imagine how it would feel if you could have taken yourself or your loved one to Jesus, and he with a touch or a word would have administered instantaneous wellness. How would you respond then? Would it not be with a mixture of awe and exuberance? You would be amazed at his power and compassion and overjoyed at the results. What would it be to respond rightly in the situation? Certainly with gratitude, but in this short text this morning, there are three segments, and each one puts our attention on a right response to the healing work of God in Christ. So that is how I want to break it down this morning. I want us to consider right responses to the healing work of God in Christ.

I. The Right Response of Service

A. In the first segment we learn some interesting facts about Peter. For one, he was married. For another, he had a house. And his mother-in-law appears to have lived with him. Grasping hold of these facts gives a better connection to Peter. We can identify with him and his family, and we have a better idea of the fact that they were regular people just like you and me.

B. When Jesus came into the house he saw Peter’s mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. Luke who, as you may remember, was a physician, notes in his account that the fever was high. In that culture and time, lying down

would have meant lying on the floor and that would also indicate that this fever had incapacitated her.

Peter had already become a follower of Christ. Back in Matthew 4, we saw where Jesus had said to Peter and Andrew there by the Sea of Galilee, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." They responded immediately, leaving their nets to spend their lives going after him. Some time had passed between that encounter and this one. Peter was following Christ. So it is notable that the fact that Peter was following Christ did not exempt him from experiencing serious trials in his life. The fact that this woman was the mother-in-law of Peter, disciple of Jesus, did not exempt her from becoming seriously sick.

Likewise, the fact that you may be a follower of Christ will not exempt you or your family from sickness and the kind of trouble that is part of living in a sin-cursed world. Sometimes people get to thinking that God will spare them from sickness and trouble since they belong to God. But the fact is that Christians become ill just as surely as those who do not follow Christ. Followers of Christ contract cancer and colds, leukemia and lupus, multiple sclerosis and meningitis, diphtheria and diabetes as the rest of the human population. And why is it? The ultimate reason is because we are sinners. And we live on a spinning graveyard. In Romans 5, Paul declared that when sin came into the world that death came through sin and so death spread to all because all sinned. Sickness and illness and disease are all part of what brings death. Becoming a follower of Christ does not exempt you from disease any more than it exempts you from death. Every sickness declares to us that we are sinners in a cursed world. Even if saved, sinners still and not removed from this cursed world yet.

So how should Christians respond when we get sick? For one, do not be shocked and surprised. Just because we do not like it, does not mean that it is unlikely to happen. And just because I am or you are a follower of Christ does not mean that it should not happen to me or you. None of us hope to get sick, but when we do, it should not shake our faith. Christian and non-Christian alike die. And Christian and non-Christian alike become ill. Getting sick does not prove you have no faith. Getting sick proves you live in a sinful world and that you too are a sinner.

C. But now when Jesus saw Peter's mother-in-law in this dreadful condition, he had compassion on her. He touched her hand. According to Luke he also rebuked the fever. And the fever left her, and how did she respond? She rose and began to serve the Lord. Another important detail added by Luke is the word "immediately." "Jesus rebuked the fever and it left her and IMMEDIATELY she rose and began to serve." It tells us that the fever and its effects were suddenly and completely gone—all at once and altogether. So well was she that she arose and began serving.

Now this is remarkable! No one telling her to catch her breath or to recuperate before getting back on her feet. No, the one who has been healed by Jesus has not only the strength but also the driving will and determination to serve. Jesus served her. Now she is going to serve him.

I want you to think on the example of this dear woman. She did not serve in order to be healed. No, she was healed in order to serve. The gospel is reflected beautifully in this woman. We do not serve Christ in order to be made better. We do not offer up to him our good works so he will take pity on us and lift us out of our sin. Rather we come to Christ with nothing in our hands but our sins and our wretchedness. Trusting in Christ, we receive from him forgiveness and spiritual healing. We have to rely completely on his work to bring us from sickness to wellness, from death to life.

When we rise from death to spiritual life, the right response is that we rise to serve. The right response to the saving work of Christ in our lives is to serve the Lord Jesus Christ just as surely as this woman rose from her sickness to serve him. She came to him as he had come to her. Jesus came and served her. Now she is serving him.

Listen. If Christ has come to you and has saved you, there is one foundational description of how you should respond to him. It is expressed in this word: SERVE. We should regard ourselves as servants. That's the way the Apostle Paul regarded himself. He introduces himself in his letters to the Romans and the Philippians in this way, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus." Brothers and sisters, I wonder how much you give yourself to realizing and living out that you are a servant of the Lord Jesus.

Serving and servanthood should describe the bent of our hearts. Jesus declares that those who are great in the eyes of the kingdom of God are not those who dominate others but those who serve, just like the way Jesus came. Not to get but to give. Serving Christ, we should serve one another. That is true in our personal relationships, in our homes, in our work relationships, in the world, and certainly on the church.

We need to challenge ourselves as a church family with the importance of serving. As we have cranked up the fall schedule and are in full swing, one of our weaknesses has been exposed. I asked the elders this past Tuesday to comment on what they saw as the greatest needs in our church family. There were several responses, but one of the strongest answers came that our family needs to be renewed in our service. It's like Jesus observed about the harvest. The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. At GCC the needs and opportunities are significant but the workers are few. I am thankful that a number of you responded to our appeal for the volunteer positions, but there remain needs particularly with reference to Wednesday children's ministry. It is an appropriate time to remind you that the body builds up itself effectively only when every part is working properly. Church life is the life of a body. We are not a business, selling goods and services. We are a family. And we need each of us serving the Lord Jesus together. So in what capacities are you serving? And could you deny yourself to serve in places where the need is more urgent? And live with the attitude of serving. Paul tells slaves that even in their work to realize they are serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Peter's mother-in-law is a great example this morning of how we should respond to the healing power of God in Christ Jesus.

Now, continuing to look for right responses to the healing power of God in Jesus, I want you next to see . . .

II. The Right Response of Awe

A. It is a really good thing that Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law because that evening they entertained a great crowd. That very evening crowds came and Jesus went into action. Verse 16 says, "They brought to him many who were oppressed by demons and he cast the spirits out with a word and healed all who were sick."

One right response to the healing power of God in Christ Jesus is to come. Apparently the word spread that Jesus was there in town and Peter's mother-in-law had been healed. It was most likely a Sabbath day. That ended at evening; so as soon as they were able the people came. Certainly the power of Jesus should compel us to come to Him. No one else can do what he can do. No one has ever been able to do what he did. Why go anywhere else? Why not believe in him?

B. Aspects of this verse that really stick out amplify the amazing power of Christ which was being exhibited. First, "they brought to him MANY who were oppressed by DEMONS, and he cast out the spirits with a WORD." Little details matter a lot. Many. Many were brought who all went away whole. Demons. It was not mosquito bites or poor attitudes that needed to be resolved. It was the oppressive power of demons – the kind of power that would run a herd of pigs down the hillside into the water. Jesus cast them away with a word! For Jesus this demonstration of absolute authority over the spiritual enemies of God was effortless. He speak a word and the oppressed goes away fine.

Second, his power is manifest in that ALL who were sick were healed. It doesn't matter what the disease was, Jesus healed them all. In our time many medical advances have been made, but there is still a host of illnesses that simply cannot even be touched by modern medicine, much less healed. But that was not the case with Jesus. It is like Matthew had reported back in chapter 4:24—they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them." The miracle working healing of Jesus in the words of one commentator, "practically banished disease from Palestine during his earthly ministry." This is so profound indeed. This power commends our awe. Not surprise but awe. Jesus Christ can do anything he wants to do. He has the authority and the power. It is mind-boggling. There is not one obstacle that can stand in the way of the will of Christ Jesus. If he wanted to heal you apart from faith, you could not stop him. But why would you?

And given all that he can do, there was only way for him to satisfy the demands of justice for our sins. And he chose it. He chose to endure the cross. In fact the healing that he was doing right here before he died on

the cross was effected by the work that he was to perform on the cross. He is commended to us as God and King and Sovereign Lord. And our right response is to worship. It is to proclaim him a great friend of sinners and a great and merciful savior. It is to extol him for his mercy that he would care enough to bring relief to these who suffered so terribly. And again, his greatness should move us not only to bow but also to serve.

C. We should be further in awe and further motivated to serve as we stop and realize that what Jesus was doing here in these healings was giving a foretaste of the glories to come. While Jesus was walking here on this spinning graveyard, he pulled back the curtains to give witnesses and us through those witnesses a preview of the future. In Christ the kingdom was here but not yet as it will be in the new heaven and new earth. In what we call the transfiguration, Jesus heavenly glory that was masked by his humanity was allowed to shine before Peter, James, and John. It was a foretaste of his future glory. And what is happening as Jesus brings healing to the many who come to him is he of course demonstrating his power and authority, but he is also projecting what he is going to do by his power and authority when his kingdom is fully come.

When John in Revelation saw the new heaven and the new earth, he saw the holy city in her beauty and he heard the voice of God declaring that his dwelling is with his people. He also heard this: "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore; for the former things have passed away."

Many that Jesus healed got sick again. Everyone he healed eventually died. But, for those who come to Christ for salvation, who enter by the narrow way that leads to life, they will enter into the very presence of Christ. There his reign will be forever consummated and the curse of sin will be completely undone. They will never die again. They will never get sick again. They will be healthy and whole for all eternity. They won't have to check blood sugar or get vaccinations. They won't need Advil or vitamin supplements. Penicillin and chemo will be a thing of the past. Sickness and sorrow will have fled away. The older and more broken-down I get, the happier I become as I think about the new heaven and new earth. Well,

the entire creation is groaning with longings for the revealing of the sons of God at which time it will be free, free from the curse and all the consequences of sin. So our appropriate response is to come to Jesus. Come to him now and worship. Worship with awe. Worship by daily serving.

In the third segment of the text we are led to see a third right response to the healing power of God in Christ Jesus.

III. The Right Response of Recognition

In the third segment here we encounter how Matthew himself respond to the healing work of Jesus. It was a response of recognition. We need to respond to these instances of healing by recognizing what Matthew also recognized. Here is what he recognized. He wrote, "This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.'"

A. Matthew recognized that what Jesus was doing in terms of healing these many people fulfilled what Isaiah had prophesied. He quotes these couple lines from Isaiah 53. And this is really an incredible thing. Isaiah 53—we read it earlier this morning— prophesies a coming servant of the Lord. There are many things which that prophecy says about the servant. He will be exalted. His appearance would be greatly marred. He would not have a majestic form to attract men to himself. He would be despised and rejected. He would be oppressed and afflicted without opening his mouth, like a lamb that is led to slaughter. And this, He would bear our griefs and carry our sorrows and with his wounds we would be healed. It is clear that Matthew saw Jesus' healing to be a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. And so we can affirm that there is healing in the atonement of Christ. He died to put an end to our sickness-and-disease-causing griefs. But that is not the main or fundamental accomplishment for which he served. When you listen to Isaiah 53, you hear this: "He was pierced for our TRANSGRESSIONS; he was crushed for our INIQUITIES, upon him was the CHASTISEMENT that brought us peace. All we like sheep have GONE ASTRAY; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the INIQUITY of us all. He was stricken for the TRANSGRESSION of [God's] people. His soul makes an offering for GUILT. He will make many to be

accounted righteous as he will bear their INIQUITIES; he would bear the SIN of many and make intercession for the TRANSGRESSORS.”

The clear and overriding emphasis of the work of this suffering servant is not sickness and disease but sin, transgression, iniquity, going astray. But Matthew recognizes the connection between the work of Christ which takes away the sin of God's people and that same work removing our diseases.

Disease is part of the curse brought on by the entrance of sin. Even so the removal of sin's penalty involves the removal of sin's power and involves the removal of sin's consequences. So there is a glorious reality that the absence of sickness and disease in the new heaven and earth are attributable to the atoning work of Christ Jesus the suffering servant. When he suffered to remove enmity between his people and God, he suffered to remove sickness, and disease, and ailments, and pain as well.

In this case we should think of fulfillment not merely as a foretelling which when fulfilled gives credibility to the prophet. That is not what Matthew is saying. Matthew is affirming that the authoritative word spoken by the prophet is fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is the one to whom this prophecy was pointing. Matthew's great concern in writing here continues to be to demonstrate to his readers that Jesus is the king, the messiah. And here he is also showing that Israel's great king was also to be a great servant. His service would involve taking on himself the punishment and consequences due to transgressors. Even in his healing of the masses, he was showing himself to be the great king. So that is what we should recognize as well.

Jesus died for sin. He died for peace with God. He died for suffering. He died for sickness and disease. These things all go together. So this recognition is of the great manifold aspects of the atoning work of Christ upon the cross. Every benefit you have in Christ has come through his death and resurrection. Nothing you enjoy in him has come apart from his serving you by dying in your place, by the Lord's having crushed him, having laid on him the iniquity of us. Respond to the narrative of his healing work by recognizing that EVERYTHING you enjoy in him you enjoy because he died for you. He took your death, your sins, iniquity, your hard heart, your grief, your pain, your sorrows, and your sickness when he took

his cross to Golgotha. His payment was full when he said, "it is finished." Hallelujah what a Savior.

B. So if Jesus died for our sickness and if he went around healing the masses, shouldn't all Christians be well all the time? And shouldn't we be able to go around healing people ourselves? That is what some people think. The faith of many has been shredded because they have stared in the face unhealed disease and injury wondering why God has not kept his word. But God never promised that we would escape this world without experiencing its curse.

Listen, miracles and healing in the Bible are not the regular course of things. And their highest concentration is in the person of Jesus. He is the only one who could ever heal every disease brought to him. And he did it largely to show the nature of the kingdom of which he is king when that kingdom is consummated at the end of this age. After Jesus ascended, the apostles accomplished some major healings in his name, but the healings diminished. The Apostle Paul himself suffered from an ailment, one he mentioned in Galatians 4 and the other in 2 Corinthians 12. God would not remove it from him though he prayed.

The reason why people, even the holiest of people, still get sick is the same reason why those people still sin and still die. It is because the kingdom has not yet come in its fullness. Now, God sometimes chooses to heal. But sometimes—many times—in his mercy and wisdom and sovereignty, he does not.

So what should you do in the face of sickness? Trust God. Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a good purpose for affliction. According to Psalm 119, affliction leads me to love and keep God's law. Paul's ailment resulted in his preaching the gospel in Galatia where many were converted and a church was planted. Pray and ask God to heal you, but you must have the approach of the leper, "You can heal me if you are willing." The test when God says, "No," is this, do you trust him no matter what?

Conclusion

The comforting fact is that there IS healing for everyone who comes to Jesus for cleansing from sin. It is not here in this spinning graveyard, but it is there in the new heavens and new earth.

The thing is, as I bring things to a conclusion, wouldn't it be crazy wonderful if Christ's followers were as determined to defeat sin in our lives and serve Christ with our whole hearts as we are to defeat disease in our bodies?