

As sin and disease are conquered

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[0 : 00] The Savior's Kingdom Grows Last week we saw it grow as disciples were called and as they were sent out.

And now we're going to look at how it grows as sin and disease are conquered. We're going to read on page 861 and we're going to read verses 12 to 26.

As I said, Jesus has just called Peter and the others. He's continuing his ministry in Galilee around the Lake of Galilee, the Lake of Gennesaret, as it's sometimes called. And here we have another two episodes in which he's involved.

Luke chapter 5, verse 12. While Jesus was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.

And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, I will. Be clean. And immediately the leprosy left him. And he charged him to tell no one, but go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.

[1 : 40] But now even more, the report about Jesus went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he will withdraw to desolate places and pray.

And one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal.

Behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed. And they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus. But finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said, Man, your sins are forgiven you. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, Who is this who speaks blasphemies?

Who can forgive sins but God alone? When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them, Why do you question in your hearts? Which is easier to say, Your sins are forgiven you, or to say, Rise and walk?

[2 : 54] But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. He said to the man who was paralyzed, I say to you, Rise, pick up your bed, and go home.

And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home glorifying God. And amazement seized them all. And they glorified God.

And were filled with awe, saying, We have seen extraordinary things today. Amen. And that is the word of the Lord. May he bless it to us. Now let's pray for a moment or two before we look at this together.

Let's pray. Father, probably these stories are familiar to many of us. Probably you've heard them from our childhood.

Help us to listen to them afresh today. Help us to wonder and marvel, like the crowd saying, We have seen extraordinary things.

[3 : 54] Lord, we pray, that as we bring our weakness to your strength, our sin to your holiness, our mortality to your eternity, that you will indeed open your word to our hearts, and that you will open our hearts to your word.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. There was an outstanding preacher of an earlier generation, a man called Leslie Weatherhead, who was part of a family of pretty outstanding preachers.

And he ministered in the early part of the 20th century. And he certainly was a good preacher as far as rhetoric and as far as presentation went.

And he also wrote a book. Well, he wrote several books. The particular book I'm talking about is a book called It Happened in Palestine.

Long out of print. Thank goodness. It Happened in Palestine. And among other things, he talked about these two episodes we've just read.

[5 : 07] And according to Weatherhead, the leper was already healed when he came to Jesus. He had been given natural healing by a doctor, and Jesus had made him feel better about himself.

So he'd gone away. And as far as the other story is concerned, the friend's kindness was such that the man felt life was worth living again.

So apparently it didn't happen in Palestine. You see, this is a dead end. A kind of liberal kind of trying to water down the story.

Take it away from any kind of help, any kind of teaching it can give to us. There's another dead end. There are those who say, if this were happening now, people would be flooding into our churches. What we need are healing services, exorcisms. What we need is storms stilled. And all these kind of wonderful things that were happening in Palestine.

[6 : 11] And then the world would believe. Now, I'll come back to that. But I believe both of these are total dead ends. And we're trying to get what this chapter is saying to us.

The way of liberalism and the way of fanaticism will lead us nowhere. They don't even ask the right questions, far less giving us the right answers. Because the gospel word is not something accompanied by the power of God.

It is the power of God. By the way, I'm not denying that God still does wonderful things when he chooses. Of course he does. He's a sovereign God. But whether he does these or not, the gospel word is not something that needs these things to authenticate it.

The gospel word is already the power of God. Verse 1, the crowd were pressing in on him to hear the word of God. So what are these episodes about?

And the other incidents of healing, of exorcism, of walking on water, and all these sorts of things. Now, they are a sign, first of all, that the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world, has come.

[7 : 25] Here is Isaiah 35, 5 to 6. Isaiah says, I always have to read these because I usually get them mixed up.

I try and quote it from memory. Usually something like, the lame see, the deaf walk. And the blind, you know, it's very, very easy to get them mixed up. But in any case, this is what's happening here. The Messiah, the Son of Man, has come. And he's come as God's agent to do these wonderful things. But he also anticipates the new creation.

It anticipates the time when all these things, death, disease, will have gone. And when Jesus will make our lowly bodies like his glorious body.

That's what Paul says in Philippians 3, 20 to 21. And when we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly bodies and make them like his glorious body.

[8 : 28] So you see, these wonderful miracles of healing say, look, the Messiah has come. And they're pointing forward to the time when all sickness will be healed. See, everyone was not healed in Palestine.

The cemeteries didn't empty. But they do point to that day when death and disease are conquered. So that's the first thing then. These are signs that the Messiah has come.

And they point to the time when he will come again. They are token miracles. And by token miracles, I don't mean gestures. But what I mean is they show what it will be like on a universal scale when he returns.

I want to say this as well. Well, I discovered a long time ago, when you say that something is more important than something else, people hear you as saying the other thing is not important at all.

That's one thing I learned from my mother long ago. I learned many things. My mother was a very good cook. And I used to love her cooking. And sometimes I would say, I like this better than that.

[9 : 36] And she would never make that. And I would say a month later, Mom, I thought you said you didn't like it. No, I hadn't said I didn't like it. I said I didn't like it so much.

I'm going to make a statement. I don't want this to be misheard. The forgiveness of sin is more important than the healing of the body. Let me repeat that.

The forgiveness of sin is more important than the healing of the body. Don't hear that as saying the healing of the body doesn't matter. Of course it matters. We pray regularly for healing.

We want to be well. We want our loved ones to be well. The trouble is, the point is healing lasts for this world only. Forgiveness of sins lasts for eternity.

I think that was the introduction. So since time's rushing on, I'd better go on to the meat of what I was going to say. Far too long an introduction. Many Cornhill people note that.

[10:36] Introduction should never be as long as that one. Two things about Jesus which these stories taken together show.

First of all, his compassion. That is the first thing that runs through these stories and indeed through all these stories in the early chapters of Luke. If he's truly the one who is to come, if he is truly the Messiah, if he is truly the Lord from heaven, we would expect him to reveal the qualities of God, would we not?

And what's the God of the Old Testament like? Well, Dawkins says he's a blood-lusting, bigoted homophobe. That's not what Moses says. Moses says in Exodus 34, The Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin.

That's just one example. But right through, in Psalm 103, as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. So how do these stories show Jesus' compassion?

First of all, his care for the unknown. Neither the leper nor the paralytic are famous. Indeed, they're not even given a name. They're never mentioned again.

[12:01] So Jesus comes to the outcast, the despised, and to the sinner. That marks his ministry. And he shows no dismay at the unconventional behavior of the friends of the paralyzed man.

Though probably Luke has this interesting little detail through the tiles. That would probably be easier to remove without excessive debris. I just hope, by the way, the guys who were there went looking up gaping with their mouths open.

One shudders to think what might have been lurking in the roofs then. So in Elizabethan times they had four-poster beds to stop the nasty things in the ceiling falling on them. Anyway, he's here to proclaim good news to the poor.

Says that back in chapter 4, verse 18. And we need to learn this, don't we? Evangelicalism, celebrity culture, is always wanting to be seen with the good and the great.

This is a picture of me beside Don Carson. You know, that kind of thing. But Jesus does not do that. Jesus comes to the poor, the outcast, the unknown, and brings them the word of life.

[13:11] And he comes right to where people are. Verse 13. He touched him. Jesus could simply have spoken and healed the leper.

Because after all, it was his word rather than his touch that healed the leper. It was his powerful word that he spoke. But he touched the leper.

Touch does not mean, like in some of the paintings of El Greco, he's standing at a great height and putting out his hand and saying, Oh, be clean. Touch means that he actually put his arm around the man.

He hugged him. He showed his solidarity with him. That's what Jesus does, his compassion. The word, says John, became flesh.

The pagan gods were not compassionate. The pagan gods didn't cuddle lepers. The pagan gods didn't care for the poor. The pagan gods never dried anybody's tears.

[14:07] But this God, this true God, manifest in the flesh. First thing about him is his compassion. He loved the sinner and he still loves the sinner.

The second thing is, compassion is wonderful, but it's not in itself the gospel. Because we can be extremely compassionate and unable to alleviate the situation.

I mean, after all, this is characteristic of humanity, isn't it? We're all utterly horrified by what's going on in Syria. But nobody knows what to do to alleviate it.

I mean, all these refugee camps, terrible killings and so on. And very often in our own private lives, our loved ones, our friends have some huge problem.

And we can show them compassion. We can do what Jesus did. We can put our arm around them. But Jesus can do more. Jesus, and the second thing I want to talk about is Jesus' authority.

[15:10] His compassion is not simply compassion, but its authority to transform. And this comes especially through his powerful word. Verse 14.

He charged the leper, go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them. Now notice he underwrites the words of Moses.

As Leviticus 14 talks about how the leper, if he is blessed enough to be cured, has to go to the priest and undergo a ritual.

And this was no easy nodding through. This ritual took a week. In fact, it took eight days. And the priest had been given authority to pronounce the leper clean.

Now notice the difference between the priest and Jesus here. The priest could only announce the leper clean once he was clean. He couldn't make the leper clean the way Jesus did.

[16:10] He could pronounce him clean because he had delegated authority. But Jesus' authority, the words of Jesus, could heal and cleanse. And remember, this runs right through Scripture, the powerful word.

Remember Genesis 1. God said, God said, God said. And there was. Words that actually bring about what's going to happen.

Now with humans, there always have to be conditions applied to it. Many times I've stood in front of a starry-eyed couple and said, and I'll pronounce you husband and wife. I can't go down into Buchanan Street or Socky Hall Street, and every couple I see hand in hand say, oh, by the way, I pronounce you husband and wife.

Because my words in that situation have no authority. The only authority in the other situations, because the legalities and the delegated authority is in place.

But Jesus' words need no other authority. So he goes right to the heart of the law. And then his word has authority in both time and eternity.

[17:16] And this is mainly in the story of the paralyzed man, the second story. Now the man came for healing. But Jesus deals first with his most importantly, verse 20, your sins are forgiven you.

And there's another element comes into this story, which is going to become increasing as the story goes on. Verse 17, he was the Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there.

However, the Pharisees were essentially the experts in religious behavior, in the way to behave in the temple, the way to behave in your ordinary lives, whereas the scribes or the teachers of the law were experts in theology.

And this is going to become an increasing feature of Jesus' ministry. Now that's exactly what the problem is. Nobody, including the scribes and Pharisees, disbelieved that sins could be forgiven. That wasn't the point. They did believe that sins could be forgiven. The Old Testament is full of teaching and examples of sins being forgiven. The point is, no prophet, no priest, no king could pronounce forgiveness in his own name.

[18:35] That is the point here. Who can forgive sins except God only? You see, in Isaiah 6, the prophet, seeing the Lord in the temple, falls down and asks forgiveness for his own sins before he's sent out with a message to others.

If you read Leviticus 16, the Day of Atonement, the high priest has to make sacrifice for his own sins before he can make sacrifice for others.

And when he does, it's in the Lord's name. And King David, in Psalm 51, comes to the Lord as a humble penitent. And as he grubbles in the dust, asks for forgiveness.

So you see, all these people, these leaders in the Old Testament, pronounce forgiveness, but they pronounce it in the Lord's name. Here is someone pronouncing it in his own name.

What is that name? In verse 24, you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. Now, the Son of Man comes from Daniel 7. The Son of Man is the one who is going to judge the world and who is going to reign forever.

[19:44] And because he is going to judge the world, because he's going to reign forever, he can pronounce forgiveness of sin now. And that's the gospel, isn't it? But, this is blasphemy, surely.

That's what they say. Now, the point, that's why Jesus speaks a new word of authority. Notice he has two things. One, your sins are forgiven you. Now, as always, when that happens, that's invisible to the onlooker.

When you come to the Lord, it's invisible to, even if it's in a crowd of people, it's invisible. But, here was a word that's going to be visible and going to authenticate the word of forgiveness.

And, you'll notice what the man does. Jesus says, three things, rise, pick up your bed and go home. And, it's not just repetition in the next verse.

The man does exactly what Jesus commands him. Now, I want you to notice two things about this healing, which is characteristic of all Jesus' healings.

[20 : 52] Jesus' healing was instantaneous. And, it was complete. Jesus didn't say, come back in six months for a check-up. This was true healing from the Son of Man, who has authority on earth to forgive sins, and who has authority on earth to fight disease.

As I said earlier on, forgiveness is more important than healing. Now, we hear no more about this man. Let's say we don't know his name.

Presumably, he lived for another, we don't know how few, or how many years he lived. But, clearly, at some point, he would die. At some point, there would be an illness, from which he would not get better.

Where is he now? Well, he has been in heaven for nearly 2,000 years. I'm sure he often looks back to this day.

I'm sure he often feels, I'm so glad I didn't have to choose between the two gifts that Jesus gave.

Remember, Jesus gives him two gifts, healing and forgiveness.

[22 : 00] And, surely, as he looks back, he not only thanks God for that healing, which gave him a greater quality of life in this world, but for that forgiveness, which lasts for all eternity.

And that's what this story is saying to us. Now, obviously, it is good, and it's not the prosperity gospel, we all want to be well. We don't want to be ill, and so on.

But, we're not guaranteed that, in this world. These are token miracles. What we are all guaranteed, is the forgiveness of sins. Sometimes, Jesus may do these other things as well.

Whether he does them or not, a truly important thing, is the faith, which brings our weakness into contact with God's power. Now, it wasn't the faith of the leper, or the faith of the three, or the four men, or the faith of the man who jumped up from his mat.

It was the power of Jesus, but it was their faith that brought Jesus' power into contact with their weakness. There's always the danger of opposition and unbelief.

[23 : 10] So, as we finish today, I think this story is so much more valuable to us than if we see it as a model of the kind of thing that ought to be happening today.

Nothing of the sort. This is telling us who the Son of Man is. It's telling us he has a future for us that does not just belong to this world, but the world to come.

That our life is in the hands of one who has both compassion and authority. Amen. Let's pray.

Father, we praise you for those amazing things.

We thank you for the Word made flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ, one with you, who became one of us and is one of us still. We thank you for his compassion, his compassion that we experience in the difficulties and toughness of life, and for his authority, that authority which saved us, and that authority will one day bring us to his Father's house.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.