

Jesus the Great Healer - from the virus of sin

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 December 2020

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Isaiah had promised that God himself would intervene one day to restore all things. That as we heard, he said his own arm would bring salvation.

But it's Peter, the Apostle of Christ, who tells us how this was actually fulfilled. And he tells us that this was accomplished only as God, the great Savior, became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, his son.

To be himself the sin bearer for his people. So that he could be the great healer for us and for our world.

Listen to Peter's words from his first letter. He, that is, Jesus, the Son of God. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.

That we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. There is light, there is joy in Jesus' birth, yes.

[1 : 24] But already, clouds of darkness are forming. Because he was born into this world in order to die. Our healing, says Peter, comes only through his wounds.

Our homecoming, only through his desolation. Before we think a little bit about this great healing message of Christmas.

This lovely carol focuses our minds on God, the great healer himself. Son of God, oh, how bright. Love is smiling from thy face. Strikes for us now the hour of grace.

Savior, since thou art born. God's lamp, O Lord.

God, what schools in need. Lord, when Lord, seize the veil of victory.

[2 : 35] though no End?

The light Earth resounding Clear and long Far and near The angels' song Christ's Redeemer Is here Christ's Redeemer Is here Till the earth Till the earth Till the earth Son of God God of God God is God of God God of God Christ's Redeemer

Jesus God of God God of God God of God Dear deise-la abd Dear deise-la abd Well, there can't be many in the country at the end of 2020, who are utterly weary of lockdowns and longing for life to be far, far more than the pale shadow that has become for us, this sort of bare existence we've got used to.

And yet, the strange predicament that we find ourselves in and find ourselves enduring at the moment actually also is a vivid reminder. It's like a picture of a far greater reality that we don't often want to acknowledge.

And that is that this whole world and our whole human lives are locked down from beginning to end under a looming cloud of disease and of death.

[5 : 49] And that is not a cloud that's going to be dissipated by a vaccine or by any other ingenious medicine of humankind. Now, let me say right away, I'm a great believer in vaccines.

I've had many of them all through my life, given all our children vaccines. And I thank God for them. Surely, they have been one of the great lifesavers of this last century. I think vaccines probably have prevented more illness than any other thing.

So certainly, I hope very much that the speed of the rollout and the development of this or these various new vaccines that are coming for COVID, that they don't backfire, that we don't end up with a huge loss of public confidence in vaccines in general.

I think it's understandable, isn't it, that many people have a sense of wariness about something that's come so quickly. There might be unknown side effects and so on. So there's a real need for open discussion.

Certainly, that's what I think, so that people are able to air these things and get answers. Coercion will be very counterproductive, I think. But let's hope for the very best.

[6 : 55] Let's hope that through that and other things, we will get into a very swift end to all of these lockdowns and the misery that it's causing for millions all around the world.

But friends, even if that is so, and even if we are able to get back to not a new normal, but the old normal, the normal normal that we all want to be back to, the fact is that the only normal that we can ever aspire to as human beings is the universal normality of aging and sickness and ultimate death. And what the recent pandemic and its aftermath has thrust right into our faces is that perennial reality. That our greatest weakness, that our ultimate problem is in the tragic fact of our mortality. That as Shakespeare said, our life is but a walking shadow and a poor player that struts and frets its ire upon the stage and then is heard no more.

So not a single life will be saved by the Pfizer vaccine or the Oxford vaccine or any other vaccine or any other cure for any other disease. Only death postponed.

[8 : 19] And perhaps not for very long, given the very great age of those mostly who are being vaccinated at the moment. Human beings have no ultimate cure for the world's most deadly disease, which is our universal mortality.

One out of one human beings born will die. And that's why I want you to understand tonight what Christmas is really all about.

And Christ's apostle Peter, as we read, lays it out so clearly in those verses from his first letter. I think they'll be there on the screen. You see, he tells us that Jesus Christ is the great healer, that he came into the world to bring that ultimate cure to the world's most devastating disease, which is the deadly virus of human sin.

And it's 100% fatality rate. So let me try and explain what Peter is saying in these verses.

First of all, Peter says that Jesus Christ came into this world to bring healing. The true healing of ultimate reconciliation with God our creator.

[9 : 35] By his wounds, you have been healed, says Peter. He's clearly not speaking about merely medical things here, merely physical healing in that sense.

Peter's alluding to the prophet Isaiah, who famously spoke of God's anointed servant who would suffer for his people's true healing. You probably know the chorus from Handel's Messiah. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. And he goes on, but he was wounded for our transgressions.

That is our rebellion against God's rule. He was crushed for our iniquities, the deep unfaithfulness that utterly ruptures our relationship with God.

And with his stripes, says the prophet, we are healed. By his wounds, you see, you have been healed, says Peter. He's quoting.

[10 : 36] And wouldn't you say that our world of humanity is in desperate need of healing? Ultimate healing? I think unless you live with your head in the clouds or your head in the sand.

It's very hard, isn't it, to think otherwise. You only have to read the news for a day or two. You see, the Bible is a real book about the real world.

It tells us as it is. It doesn't pull punches. Think of those words that we read a little earlier from the prophet Isaiah. They certainly speak of a world that needs desperate healing.

Just like our world still does today. A world of violence. A world of evil. A world of exploitation. What did he say? Their feet run to evil.

They're swift at shedding innocent blood. The way of peace they do not know. Well, we can sing peace on earth as much as we like at Christmas, can't we?

[11 : 33] But there's precious little peace in Syria, in Armenia, and countless other places today. Righteousness stands afar off.

Truth has stumbled in the public squares. But we live in a time, don't we, of bitter disillusionment with public life. And that's true in the oldest, most liberal democracies in the world.

No one goes to law, honestly, says Isaiah, hundreds of years ago, thousands of years ago. They rely on empty pleas. They speak lies. They conceive mischief. They give birth to iniquity.

But you might think he was talking about the current government antics, wouldn't you? Or the elections on both sides of the Atlantic. Or the car emission scandals.

Or all sorts of things that we see all around us today. But in fact, Isaiah was writing that nearly 3,000 years ago. The truth, you see, about our world is that human beings haven't changed at heart.

[12 : 38] Since ancient days. And the issues that face us in the 21st century are almost exactly the same as those that faced mankind in the 8th century BC.

And all the times in the 21st century are also in the 21st century. And all the times in between. Because we share a common humanity. A common human nature. And that nature is infected. It's corrupted. It's diseased. And it needs healing. And the Bible tells us why. You see, listen to Isaiah. Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God.

And your sins have hidden his face from you. So that he does not hear. And according to the Bible, you see, that's the root problem of humanity.

All humanity. All throughout history. Throughout every culture. Every nation and people on this earth. And that fundamental distance between mankind and God our creator is at the heart of what the Bible means by sin.

[13 : 43] And when the most precious, when the most basic, most fundamental relationship in human life ruptures, there's going to be an inevitable trail of tragedy, isn't there?

We know that in our experience. When the fundamental relationship of the family and a marriage is ruptured. It leads to agonizing pain, doesn't it?

For the whole family. For friends. For communities. And when it becomes multiple all over the place, well, the whole of society becomes damaged and fractured. We know that.

Terrible pain. But that's the story of humanity. According to the Bible. Genesis 3 tells of that story of rupture between God and man.

With human beings ultimately rejecting God's gracious rule, God's blessings. And putting themselves at odds with God. Then immediately he reads of Genesis chapter 4.

[14 : 42] And the story goes on with the vicious aftermath, doesn't it? Man at odds with man. Brother slaying brother. And on and on it goes. You see, when human beings usurp the place of God, when they banish God from their lives, well, the beautiful reign of the sovereign God is exchanged for the beastly reign of selfish man.

And the relational holocaust that results from that is what explains our whole world. Relationship breakdown, relationship rupture is at the heart of all our world's problems, isn't it?

Nation at odds with nations. And trade wars and currency wars that very often lead in the end to military wars. Race at odds with race. Leading to exploitation and resentment.

That poisons cultures for generations, for centuries. Employers and workers at odds with one another. Bringing misery and strife and all kinds of disharmony.

Man at odds with woman. And all the catastrophic epidemics of relationship breakdown and family rupture and damaged children and disintegrating communities.

[16 : 01] And even if some of us might live a rather charmed life and quite insulated from many of these things personally in our own lives, none of us, none of us can avoid the greatest and the most painful rupture of all.

The rupture of human death. It robs us, doesn't it? Of our nearest and dearest loves. The most precious relationships we will ever have in our lives.

And surely it's at this time of year, around Christmas, that we feel that so much more than any other time. The dark shadow of death. Because we're remembering, aren't we? Previous Christmases.

Where now, loved ones, will be so painfully absent. And something deep within us groans. And the scandal of it. Because we know it shouldn't be like this.

Yes, our whole world is so wrong. It's sick. And it needs healing, desperately. But you see, all of these things are just the symptoms.

[17 : 13] They're caused by the ultimate rupture at the very heart of the universe. Which is caused by human beings rebelling against God, our maker and our ruler. By our sin.

And no power on this whole earth can ever possibly cure that. We can have the United Nations, the G8, the World Economic Forum, the IMF, and any other thing you can mention.

But have they cured the world? We've had communism. We've had fascism. We've had socialism. We've had capitalism. Has that cured the world? Well, some of them have nearly destroyed the world.

That's for sure. Is Scottish nationalism the answer to save us now? Is Brexit going to cure the world? Is the World Economic Forum and the Great Reset going to cure the world?

No. No. God saw, said the prophet Isaiah, that there was no man. No one to intercede for humanity's sickness.

[18 : 22] No one who could bring healing to the human condition. And then, his own arm brought salvation.

He put on righteousness as a breastplate, a helmet of salvation on his head. God himself, in the person of his incarnate son, Jesus Christ, came to do what no man could ever do.

To bring healing. To bring salvation. To bring salvation. But, at infinite cost to himself. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.

By his wounds, he had been healed. It required a sin bearer so powerful that he could bear away such sin. That he could bring the true healing of ultimate reconciliation between utterly untruthful and unfaithful human beings.

And an utterly truthful and utterly faithful God. We know that, don't we? We know that. We know that when a relationship breaks due to unfaithfulness.

[19 : 33] It's only the one who's been sinned against. Who can invite the unfaithful one back into that relationship.

And it's they who must bear that bitter burden of the cost of forgiveness. There's no such thing as cheap forgiveness, is there?

It's a costly, costly thing. That's why real forgiveness from human beings is so rare. It's costly. But God himself, in Jesus, the Son of God, shed his own infinitely precious blood, as Peter calls it.

To bring the true healing of ultimate reconciliation with the God who created us. So great is his faithfulness. So great is his love.

And so you see, that means that according to Peter, secondly, Jesus Christ came into this world to bring us health. The true health of ultimate righteousness. Jesus came to make all things right again.

[20 : 43] His coming heralds the dawning of a new day for life as it was truly meant to be. Where righteousness, where rightness, that is right relationships with God and men, is the order of the day.

He came that we might die to sin, says Peter, that we might depart from that dark existence forever and live to righteousness. To rightness.

Not just to deal with the symptoms of this world's disease, but to bring total restoration of God's righteousness. That is to undo the whole curse that that separation between man and God brought into this world.

Turning God's face away from us. And left us floundering in our mess. He came to turn that around and make everything right again.

And forever. That's what God's righteousness is. It's rightness. Everything put right at the root cause. So that the fruit of that righteousness at the very heart of the universe begins to be seen everywhere again.

[21 : 52] When somebody has terminal heart failure, they're weak, they're pale, they're blue, they're bloated, they're breathless, they're moribund.

But if that person has a heart transplant, then their strength begins to come back. Their color comes back. Their breath comes back. Their life, therefore, comes back. And it's nothing less than that total rebirth of the universe that the prophets longed for.

And that we heard in the readings earlier on. In that day the wilderness shall be glad. The desert shall bloom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The ears of the deaf will be unstopped. The eyes of the blind opened. And sorrow and sighing shall flee away forever. Because God will come and save you, says the prophet.

That's real health. That's ultimate rightness. Righting everything that's wrong in this dark world. That's what the prophet promised was coming one day.

[23 : 02] That's what the end of the Bible story speaks of. The apostle John and his great vision of the glory of the new heavens and the earth. There God will be in the midst of his people forever. And it says he will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

And death shall be no more. Neither will there be sorrowing or crying anymore. For the former things have passed away. And friends, in the coming of Jesus Christ, the great healer, as a sin bearer, so powerful.

The light of that new day of health, of that ultimate righteousness, has now dawned. It's not yet fully here. Peter's very clear about that.

He's plain about that. There's no wishful thinking. There's no utopianism here or anywhere else in the Bible. Yes, he's clear. It is not yet our possession bodily.

But, because of Christ's accomplished work on the cross, sin has been dealt with. And he says we have a living hope. And that salvation, that ultimate rightness, is ready to be revealed at the last

time, says Peter.

[24 : 15] At the revelation of Jesus Christ. When he comes again, as he has promised, in glory and majesty and power. It's not yet the full brightness of that glorious day.

But, the light of dawn has certainly come. The words of Malachi, the very last prophet of the Old Testament, have been fulfilled. The sun of righteousness, he says, has risen with healing in his wings.

And that's what old Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, sang about. In the coming of Jesus, God, he says, has given knowledge of salvation to his people. In the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God.

Whereby the sunrise has visited us from on high. To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. He came to bring health.

The true health of ultimate rightness. For humanity and for our whole world. And that is the grace of Christmas, says Peter.

[25 : 20] He came to disperse the gloomy clouds of night. And death's dark shadows put to flight forever. And so finally, you see, Peter here says that Jesus Christ came into this world wonderfully to bring us home.

To the true home of ultimate restoration. Home to the lordship, to the leadership. And to the care. And to the protection of the great shepherd himself.

God's eternal son. Once, he says, you were straying like lost sheep. Hopeless. Helpless in a world utterly out of control. Who is in control of our world?

Are there any of our leaders who look much like they're in control at the moment? Once you were straying like lost sheep. But now, because of the one who has healed us from our sins.

But now you've returned. You've come home to the shepherd and the overseer of your souls. He came to bring us home. To where we belong. To be what God created us to be.

[26 : 31] Not tortured souls. Flourishing, but then fading. Withering like grass of the field. No, no. But to be those who share and who reflect the glory of true humanity.

The humanity that we have now seen in the person of Jesus Christ himself. And so that we should be like him forever. With no more death.

No more death. And when the chief shepherd appears, says Peter. He will bring this unfading crown of glory.

To all those who are his. To those who have not refused his healing. Who have not rejected his offer of grace.

But have embraced the grace and the mercy of the great healer. Who alone can bring us home. To the home where all things are right.

[27 : 37] Ransomed. Healed. Restored. Because we're forgiven of our sins. By his wounds you've been healed. If your hope is in Jesus Christ.

A new day has already dawned. The son of righteousness has risen. And true healing is in his wings for you. Listen to these words. It's the message of a glorious possibility for every kind of need.

To the lonely and the solitary. It speaks of ineffable companionship. Emmanuel. God with us. What a wonderful sun rising that can be. To the old and frail.

It brings gentle hands and kind. And the strength of the everlasting arms. To the sorrowing and the heartbroken. It pledges the oil of joy for mourning. And the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

And to those who have failed. Have been a disappointment to themselves. And to those who love them. Beauty. Beauty. For the ashes of their burnt out lives.

[28 : 39] Even here. Nay especially here. The promise of a new day. That's the true healing friends that Christmas brings.

That's what the coming of Jesus Christ into our world means. Yes. The full light of God's restoration of righteousness still lies in the future. Yes. But. The message of Christmas is that that restoration has begun.

And is irreversible. Already. The future is made certain through what Christ has done. And already. For those who know Jesus. Who have come home.

To their true shepherd. Their leader and their Lord is beginning. To change them forever. In his likeness. Already.

Those who have followed his lead. Are being touched in their lives. By that healing light. Bringing healing to. To earthly relationships. That were battered and bruised. Sometimes breached.

[29 : 38] Sometimes completely broken. Already. Already. There's an invasion. Of that health giving light. Into their lives. Into their personalities. It's begun to transform them.

In a transformation. That's going to last forever and ever. There may be a long way to go. But like somebody who's had that lethal cancer.

Cut out of their body. The decisive intervention has been made. And now the recovery is assured. And we wait with patience.

For that full restoration of health and strength. By his wounds. You have been healed. And that's the message. Of true healing.

That the Christian gospel offers to all. God wants you to know. The healing. And the true health of his righteousness. Of his salvation. He wants you to know the ultimate healing.

[30 : 37] Of his eternal glory. But he also wants you to know right now. In your life today. The sunrise. Of that healing forgiveness. To warm your heart.

To soften your heart. To bring things that have perhaps been very, very wrong. And set them steadily to rights. Under his tender mercy.

So many of us are in need of that, aren't we? In our relationships. A turning of things to make them right again. Maybe with you it's.

Relationships at work. Or with friends. Or with a neighbor. Or with your parents. Or with your children. Or maybe with your spouse.

These ruptures can be very, very painful, can't they? But the Lord Jesus Christ is a healer. So powerful. That in bearing your sins away.

[31 : 37] And taking them away forever. He can touch your lives. And your hearts. With the warmth. And with the joy. Of his perfect rightness.

Even now. He came to bring restoration. Restoration forever. But a restoration that begins now. Calling us now.

To have done with sin. And to live instead. To righteousness. Because our true home. Because our true home. Is. In his home.

The home of righteousness. Not in a harbor of wrong. In the coming of Jesus Christ. Into our world. There came. A healer.

So powerful. That he can. And he will. Restore. True humanity. And restore it forever.

[32 : 32] Forever. And I want to say to you all. All of you who are listening. Here tonight. Make sure.

That you have asked him to begin. Making you right. This Christmas. And he will. And he will go on doing that.

Forever. And ever. Let's pray. Oh come. Then. All you faithful.

Joyful. And triumphant. Come you to Bethlehem. Come. And behold him. Born the king of angels.

Come let us adore him.

Adore. Christ the Lord. And may this be the response. Of all of our hearts. This Christmas.

[33 : 33] This Christmas.