

JESUS CHRIST, END OF SICKNESS AND DEATH

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Scripture: Matthew 8:1-13

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When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "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 his leprosy was cleansed.

When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly." And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at the 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." And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.

This is a familiar passage but I pray to God that the familiarity should not be a hurdle for us, because God can speak to us at different times in a different way from the same words. I have entitled this message as "Jesus Christ, the coming King who will end sickness and death."

A couple of months ago, my niece fell sick. She went through a terrible condition in the hospital for nearly a month. Later, she came out of the sickness by God's grace, and she's alright now. Through the entire period of her sickness, while I was there in the hospital, I used to hear the dreadful news of someone dying or someone being rushed to the ICU. I saw all sorts of things there in the hospital. You can just imagine how a casualty looks like. I could see more closely the reality of sickness and death. Often people say that death is not a subject that one should talk about. People generally don't talk about it. But the fact is that sickness and death are terribly real. I'm sure that even you need no persuasion to believe that sickness and death are terrible real, because you have been through that in the recent past. And it's truer now; it's there all around us – in the newspaper, on the television, even on your mobile.

So what I want to ask you this morning is: How would you react to this terrible reality? I think one very common reaction is despair and rejection. You feel despair; nothing can come to any good. And along with that reaction of despair, I think another very common reaction is to ask why. Why cancer? Why infection? Why this virus? Why this heart attack? Why now? Why me?

In our passage this morning, we sickness and death. We meet a man who is suffering from leprosy, and we also meet a man whose servant is about to die. And we meet Jesus Christ, and in Him we find answers – answers as to why, answers as to despair.

WHY?

Why is the world in such a mess today? In my conversation with various people, and in their answers to that question, "Why is the world in such a mess?" I could hear more a lot of complaining. You talk to anybody and they have complaints about the environment, man's problem of corruption,

wickedness, people not taking enough responsibility. They complain about politicians – those who are manipulating the system. In other words, all the answers which I heard were what you could call the ‘horizontal’ – as to how we treat each other.

1. Evidence of a Judged World.

The bible actually has a more profound explanation for the mess in our world. Of course, it has to do with how we treat each other, but underneath, it has to do with our attitude to God. It is humanity as a whole and their vertical relationship with God. The bible sees the mess in the world, and in particular, sickness and death, as a sign that things are not right between us and God. It is the evidence of a judged world.

Let me explain this to you deeper. If you go back to the beginning of the bible, that is Genesis, we see that God made a perfect world. He gave everything to man with no sickness and death. The only condition for man was to remain under His care and governance, and he was prohibited from exercising his own volition as far as the matter of sin and death is concerned. If he chose to be within God’s grace, he would live life lacking nothing, void of sickness and death. On the other hand, if he chose to be independent of Him, he would be experiencing death and misery in separation from Him.

Adam and Eve, and in them all humanity, plunged into sickness and death by saying to God, “I want to be in charge of my life. I’ll run the world my way.” And we all have rejected Him, and that rebellion ever brought disaster on our world and caused all the mess. We could imagine it’s like the goldfish in a bowl swimming round and round. It gets bored and tries to jump out and see the outer environment. And soon it discovers it can’t. It starts dying in the new world it wanted to explore, because it was made for water. That’s the kind of fundamental principle in life.

The point is that we are made to live under God’s rule; you change it and it’s a disaster. As we have rejected God, disasters happened in our world, including sickness and death. Back in Genesis, God says, “For dust you are, unto dust thou shalt return.” In other words, you have rejected Me. Void of My life, you will die now. Sickness and death are part of God’s judgment, part of God’s just and right response for us for rejecting Him. So all along, we have seen sickness and death in this passage – a man with leprosy and a servant who was about to die. We also see sickness and death in our lives, and we see sickness and death all around us in the world where we live.

We say “Why?” and the bible’s answer is because you rejected God, and there is a sign, a taste of judgment. But I don’t think that we often think like this. I realize that this first point which I’m speaking about, the taste of God’s judgment particularly, is not very welcome. It is not joyful and welcome. You might be thinking, “Fine. We have to deal with death and sickness. We understand that. but what about God’s grace? What about healing? What about restoration? What about God’s mercy?

Matthew 8:3 Jesus raised His hand and touched the man, and He said, “I am willing. Be clean.” And immediately he was cured of his leprosy.

8:13, And to the centurion, Jesus said, “Go. Let it be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed at that very moment.

Sickness and death just gone, overcome, changed, healed. There is clearly hope here, there is an answer, there is restoration here. Jesus has done it. But the important thing that we need to understand is that this answer that Jesus is offering here does not mean that Jesus will heal all the sicknesses and stop all death today. Even those who got well and got healed, died eventually.

2. God’s Picture of a Perfect World.

I want to suggest that the main thing that Jesus is doing here is that He is giving us a picture of a perfect world. Jesus having healed the leper and the servant, He says in vs. 11, "Many will come from east and west and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." Jesus is connecting the healing to something which is future. Here Jesus is talking about a future perfect world. It's actually a world that God promised in the Old Testament. God made many promises in the Old Testament saying, "One day I will put this world in the right condition."

It's worth looking back into the bible for these promises:

Isaiah 25:6-8 On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.

This is a taste of what God has in store – foods, wine, celebration of people. In 25:7 he says, "On this mountain He will destroy the tribe that unfolds all the people. He will swallow death forever." But again, if you see, one day sickness will come and death will strike. That is the reality in this world. Both the centurion's servant as well as the leper have died after receiving complete healing from the Lord. But in this new world, nothing will spoil God's policy, nothing will take away God's life, nothing will bring any tears. Basically it's a promise of what we call heaven – God's perfect world. It's a fantastic promise. The problem is that it seems rather unbelievable for us.

But, a man called Jesus walks into the world and meets somebody who is sick, and He says in vs. 3, "I am willing. Be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him. And He says in vs. 13 "Go and it will be done," and the servant is healed at that very hour. We've got a promise of a perfect world where sickness and death are just taken away. And then Jesus comes and He gives us a demonstration of it. He gives us proof of it, a picture of the future kingdom. The healing is amazing; there is no examination, no prescription, no surgery, no drugs, no complications, no rehabilitation, no physiotherapy, no outpatient department. It's amazing! A word, a touch – and the sickness is gone.

What Jesus is doing here is giving us a picture of the future. I remember once I went on a company conference tour and we were taken to the ocean to see the coral reef. We had no idea at time – I'm talking about ten years back. Before the trip, we were taken to a small auditorium and was shown a 20-minute movie on the coral reef. The picture of the coral reef was amazing. Everybody was astonished. The experience was almost real, as if one was under the sea. Many of us on the tour then opted to go for the coral reef trip, while before they had planned to go shopping. The company made you believe that the trip was worthwhile. But if we didn't have the foretaste of the trip, we would not have believed it was worth it, and wouldn't have gone on the trip. This was the whole point of the promotion video.

This is what Jesus is doing here. He comes into our world and says, "I am God's king, the rescuer. I am going to bring about God's kingdom. I am going to bring about God's perfect world, the world of Isaiah 25. I am going to put an end to all the misery, put this world in the right order. We think to ourselves: "Really? That's a lot to believe – a dream world." And Jesus says, "Let Me give you a picture of it. Let Me give you a demonstration of it. Let Me give you a trailer as to how the future will unfold." And He heals the leper by just touching him. And He heals the centurion's servant by sending the word. This is nothing but a foretaste that God gives even today to many people.

As to the full reality of the future kingdom, it's like the trailer of the future date when Jesus will return and once again He will speak and sickness and death will evaporate and vanish. And God's

perfect world will start. We said sickness and death often leads to despair, but in the face of death, nothing is going to do any good. But Jesus is saying here, "Look at the picture of the future that is in the last world. In My kingdom, there is no death, there is no sorrow, there is no sickness. Everything is in order." So, there is an answer to sickness and death. There is a king called Jesus who will bring about God's perfect kingdom.

3. How to enter God's Perfect World.

Now the question is: If this is what Jesus is going to do how can we be part of the kingdom? How can we be part of God's perfect world? Our **future** lies in God's flawless world, but we have to start somewhere.

In vs. 10, when Jesus heard this, He was astonished, and said to those who followed Him, "Truly I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such great faith. I say to you, many will come from east and west and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of heaven." Jesus is saying that this man is going to be included in God's party. He's going to sit down at the feast. And why? Because he has faith. He's talking about the centurion.

Many times we get confused as to what is faith. Faith sometimes seems rather vague to us. What does it mean to have faith? Let's look at this man again to see what is faith, because Jesus said this guy is going to be in the kingdom of God. All that the centurion said was, "Lord, come and heal my servant. I am not worthy to have You under my roof." But Jesus is now saying, "Many will come from east and west and will take part in the kingdom of God," which means that He is including the centurion into God's kingdom, the perfect God's world which we are speaking about. What is this guy doing that we normally find so difficult?

What does it mean to have faith?

I think we discovered two things from this centurion.

- **Faith means you don't trust yourself.** Vs. 7 Jesus said to the centurion, "I'll go and heal he servant." But the centurion said, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word and my servant will be healed." This centurion had seen something in Jesus' life – his love, his humility, his generosity, his integrity. That has made him realize that he cannot have Jesus come into his house. He must have realized how unworthy he was. He says to himself, "I know what I am like. I know what I have done, and said. I know the mistakes that I have made being a Roman officer. I have mistreated and unjustly treated many innocent people. I am not worthy to have Jesus come under my roof." You see the humility of this man! Jesus is amazed when He said that.

This centurion is thinking that he is not worthy to have Jesus come under his roof to heal his servant, and therefore he said, "Just send the word, and my servant will be healed." If he is not worthy to have Jesus under his roof, how much less worthy is he to have a place in Jesus' perfect world? The first point of faith is not trusting yourself. "I don't deserve this," he said. And Jesus says, "You are the right candidate for faith."

- **Faith means putting your trust in Jesus.** He says, "I don't deserve to have You come under my roof, but just say the word and my servant will be healed. I'm a man under authority with soldiers under me. I tell this one to go, and he goes, and the other one to come, and he comes. I tell my servant to do this, and he does it. So it is with you, Jesus."

In the Roman army, they had a system of delegated authority. When the centurion says that he is a man under authority, he means under the authority of the emperor. When he speaks,

it is like the emperor speaking. So he commands the soldiers, and the soldiers do listen as if they are listening to the emperor. He sees that Jesus speaks with God's authority in the same fashion. So he's likening his role as like Jesus' authority under God. He sees Jesus is God's king who is in charge of making things happen. So he entrusts himself to Him.

And that is faith. To say first of all, I can't do it, and then to say Jesus, you can do it. So, Jesus says this man will be in God's feast. This man is going to be in God's perfect world. He says, "You've got the name tag. You're going to be included in God's kingdom. There is a place set out for you because you have faith."

And if we have faith today, Jesus says the same thing to us. We might think, "I am not worthy. I don't deserve this." And then you look at Jesus and say, "But You can get me there. You can do it. You can get me a place in God's perfect kingdom. You are God's king and I trust You." Then Jesus says to us, "Come on board. Come to the kingdom. I have got a place for you, and you put your name on God's perfect world."

I'm afraid that I have to also mention the alternative to this, and that is exclusion from God's perfect world. Jesus says in vs. 11, "Many will come from east and west and take their places," but in vs. 12, "While the sons of the kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness, in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Sickness and death, we said, are a reality, and they show us the taste of God's judgment. But they speak of a much worse reality – God's full judgment of exclusion. Jesus says the sons of the kingdom will go there. He's talking about the religious Jews of His day who thought they deserved the place in the kingdom because they belong to Abraham, they belong to Israel where God made the promises. They assumed they were on the guest list, that they were sure to go in. They thought they didn't need Jesus Christ to get them in. But Jesus is saying that they will be thrown out. If we copy them and say, "Of course, I've got a place there. I'm God's child, and I don't need Jesus," we too will be excluded.

Jesus is offering us a place in a perfect world. The alternative to this is exclusion and despair. As we look at Jesus today, let's react with faith and with trust. Maybe it's for the first time that we put trust in Jesus Christ, or it might be for the thousandth time, but we keep trusting Him to take us to heaven.

Let us pray together.

Our heavenly Father. Lord, as we come to Your presence, we remember Your words that You spoke to us about our world. The world is in anarchy Lord, in a perfect disorder. But Lord, Your Son has promised us a kingdom. He is going to come and restore everything for us. He's creating a perfect world there. He said in John, "I'm going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go, I'll come back and take you to be there with Me. Where I am, you may be also." Thank you, Lord, for the wonderful promise He has given us, but help us to trust Him, to be humble like the centurion, to know that we don't deserve it. At the same time, our Savior can afford the poorest, Lord. Thank you for all that You've done in our lives in order to save us into Your perfect world. In the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.