

PATIENTS FOR THE GREAT PHYSICIAN

NO. 2835

A SERMON
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“And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician: but they that are sick.”
Luke 5:31

IF you had never heard that passage before, you would be almost certain to know where to look for it. It must be in the Gospel according to Luke, for Luke was the beloved physician, and therefore, while taking notes of our Savior's discourses, he would be able to record anything that would be likely to strike upon a physician's ear, and to be stamped upon his memory. Matthew and Mark also record this saying of our Lord, but Luke would have special reasons for mentioning it.

What a noble answer this was to the insinuations of Christ's enemies! He was sitting down with publicans and sinners, they had been invited to a feast by Levi, that is, Matthew. The scribes and Pharisees shrugged their shoulders, and said they could very readily guess what kind of character Jesus of Nazareth was, for a man is known by the company he keeps.

What an overwhelming reply Christ gave them! “Where should I be,” the Physician of souls seems to say, “but with those who need My services most? I need not come into your company, for you consider yourselves to be whole, but these publicans and sinners are, according to your way of speaking, to be regarded as sick, where should I be but with those who need to be healed?”

Christ, in associating with sinners, did not at all condone their sin. When He proved Himself to be the Friend of publicans and sinners, it was not that He would lessen the infinite distance between divine perfection and human guilt, but only that, coming down to man's fallen estate, He might lift him up, touching his leprosy, He might heal him, and coming into the hospital of sick souls, He might work there His great miracles of mercy.

But turning from the immediate occasion when these words were uttered, and coming to the words themselves, it appears from our text, that Jesus Christ is the Great Physician, and just as we see our doctors hurrying through the streets, going from one house to another on their errands of mercy, so let us go with Christ, in the chariot of His love, and let us visit some of the sick souls He has come to heal.

I. This will be our first business—TO VISIT THE SICK MAN, AND ASK HIM A FEW QUESTIONS.

First, we will ask the man who is sick, but whom Christ comes to heal, *what kind of disease it is from which he is suffering*. If he be rightly instructed, if he understands the truth, he will tell us that it is the worst disease there is. Other diseases may possibly be cured by men, but this one can never be cured except by divine interposition.

Some diseases, like fire, expire when they have burned out their fuel, but this one is of such a character that unless it is cured by sovereign grace, it will destroy both body and soul in hell. This is the worst of diseases because it does not merely affect us in one point, but it affects the entire system, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot.

It is so foul a disease that even the all-merciful God is so disgusted with it that He found it imperatively necessary that hell should be made that He might shut sin up there, as in a lazar house, when it came to the worst state. We might better bear to have the plague and the black pest let loose upon us than unbridled sin. It is the foulest disease in the sight of God, and it is the most dreadful in its consequences to man.

Our patient, if he is further asked as to the nature of his disease, will tell you that it is internal, but that it works itself out externally.

“The leprosy lies deep within.”

The sin which Christ came to heal is not something on the skin, or a mere matter of custom, or habit. Nay, my brethren, the venom of sin is in the very fountain of our being, it has poisoned our heart, it is in the very marrow of our bones, and is as natural to us as anything that belongs to us. You might even tear the man in pieces, but you could not tear his sin from him.

The Mohammedan legend tells us that Mohammed was so pure because an angel had taken out his heart, and wrung two black drops of evil out of it. Those who believe that lie little understand the great truth that what is needed is to get out of a man every drop of evil, yea, that he must be made a new man before it is possible to destroy the disease that is in him.

Two drops of evil, my brethren? It is far worse than that, for it is the whole man who is evil—all his heart, all his nature, the venom is everywhere, there is not, in unrenewed human nature, a place where you could put the point of a pin where it is not defiled with sin. It is in our entire system, we have been lying in it until we are steeped through and through with it. Sin, in human nature, is like those colors that are ingrained, the more you wash the material, the more clearly they are discovered, but wash them out you never can. So, only the precious blood of Jesus can wash out man's sin.

We bend down over our patient, and ask him another question—*“How did you get this disease?”* He answers, “I got it as diseases are generally gained. I had it in three ways, first, by inheritance.” Doubtless, many persons inherit certain diseases from their birth, and we have all inherited sin from our birth. David says expressly, and he certainly was no worse than others, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity.” That old-fashioned doctrine, that sin is bred in us—against which some people kick so ferociously, is true for all their kicking—and what is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh sooner or later. We were born of a traitor, and traitors were we born.

Nor have we merely received sin by inheritance. Sin is contagious, and we have caught it from our fellow men. Many sins, which, perhaps, we might not otherwise have fallen into, we have acquired through our association with other sinners. Hence the value of early Christian training, hence the blessedness of being found in the company of the godly. Surely you know, O man, that this world's very air is full of miasma, and laden with the germs of the plague, so you have acquired innumerable diseases of soul beside that which you have inherited from your fathers!

In addition to that, as some diseases result from intemperance and other forms of evil living, doubtless the disease which was naturally in each one of us has been fed by our transgression. We have grown worse than we originally were through that upon which our sin has fed. We have gone from bad to worse, from one iniquity to another, till folly has ripened into sin, and sin has culminated in crime. Such is the state of unrenewed man—diseased even from his birth, catching more soul maladies from others, or acquiring them by his own ill doing, our patient is indeed sick, sick unto death.

Perhaps someone asks, *“Where is this disease of which you speak?”* I have already answered that question, but I will answer it again more fully. The disease of sin in you, my hearer—for you are the patient of whom I speak—is to be found everywhere. The eyes of your understanding are darkened, so that you cannot see the things of God as God would have you see them. Your affections are perverted, so that you love that which you should hate, and hate that which you should love.

Your conscience, which should be the candle of the Lord shining within you, burns very dimly. Conscience is no more perfect than is any other power in man. I know that some people speak of conscience as though it were the vice gerent of God, but it is no such thing, it is defiled and depraved like all the rest of our powers. As for the will, my Lord Will-be-will, as Bunyan calls it, the Mayor of Mansoul, it is a slave which boasts of freedom, but is never more in bondage than when it boasts of being free.

Sinner, your very memory is prone to retain evil rather than good. It will keep the chaff, but let the wheat run through. The mere refuse, which floats down the stream, finds a place of resting with you, but if goodly cedars come down from Lebanon, you lay not hold of them. The devil's falsehoods, lascivious songs, foul words, thoughtless jeers—all these stick like burrs, but God's gracious Word, an earnest Gospel discourse, a solemn hymn—these, alas! glide from you like oil adown a block of marble, and you go your way, and forget all about them.

There is no power that you possess that has not the slime of the serpent upon it. O Satan, you have dashed down the palace of manhood! Stately are its columns, even while they lie amidst the rubbish where the grass grows and the owl hoots, but you have cast down every pillar, you have broken the shafts, and laid the capitals in the mire. Ah! you foul fiend, you have made that to be a den of darkness which was once a place of light, where holy angels, and even God Himself, could walk. How art thou fallen, O man, once a son of the morning, but now a child of darkness until God shall give thee light!

The disease of sin is everywhere in the realm of manhood, and it is all the more certainly proved to be everywhere because so many people can see it nowhere. This is why you cannot see sin in yourselves, it has made all the various faculties of your soul to mortify so that you cannot feel the pains which this mortal disease would otherwise have caused you.

Thus, your heart has lost any tenderness that it may have had naturally, and your conscience is seared as with a hot iron, so that it cannot warn you of the mischief within, but prophesies smooth things, while all is in a state of ruin, destruction, and dismay, and will be so forever unless God, by His grace, shall work a miraculous change.

Perhaps someone asks, "If the man is so diseased, *what are the effects of his sickness?*" The usual effect of all sickness is that the man's strength declines, and he begins to waste away. You do not ask a sick man to run a race, and we must not ask an unrenewed sinner to run the race of godliness. We do not expect the man who has long tossed upon the bed of pain, to march in the soldiers' ranks, and to fight battles, nor can an unsaved sinner be valiant for God and His truth.

What a dreadful inability sin brings with it! That simple command of the Gospel, "Believe," the sinner cannot obey of himself. He can no more repent and believe without the Holy Spirit's aid, than he could create a world, and unless divine grace gives him the power to obey the command which bids him to believe, he never will be able to believe. You have lost all strength, sinner. You have brought yourself down to be as one dead, and as them that sleep in the grave. Your inability is awful, and this is the effect of your sin.

Moreover, this sickness not only brings weakness, but it also impairs the beauty of the frame. We see many persons walking along our streets, poor, pale, emaciated creatures, and others who bear upon their features the marks which they must carry to the grave, of some dire disease which once made them its victims. Ah, sinner! if you could but see yourself as God sees you, you would see that you have transformed that which was the image of God for loveliness into the image of Satan for horror.

O soul, if God should ever hold up His looking glass to you, and let you see your own self as you are by nature, and by practice too, you would be greatly alarmed, for there is no more dreadful sight out of perdition than that of a naked, unregenerate human heart! So, then, sin brings a marring of all beauty. And besides this, it brings destruction of all comfort. Sick men cannot get peace and ease, they toss from side to side, but find no rest in any position.

Many of you must confess that sin gives you no comfort. I know you fill your glasses, and sing and shout that the ungodly are jolly good fellows, but they have nothing substantial to sustain their joys. I know that when you wake up at midnight, you are not at ease. I know that when you are on a lonely road, the falling of a leaf makes you start, and the more you brag, the more cowardly does it prove you to be. The very man who blasphemes God the most is generally the one who is most afraid of God. Men do but use great swelling words of vanity and boasting that they may hide the fears that lurk within them, but which they are ashamed to own.

I believe there are no such superstitious people anywhere as those who pretend that they do not believe in a God. You may toil to find pleasure in sin, but you shall never discover it. The dregs of sin are always bitter, the cup may sparkle on the brim, but when you have drained it, there shall come satiety, and woe, and redness of the eyes.

Rake all the dunghills of earth, but you will never find the jewel of peace with God, go and work in all the world's mines, till you have utterly spent yourselves, but you shall find that you have wasted your strength for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfies not. Yes, sin is a sickness that robs us of comfort.

And worst of all, it is a sickness that will end in death, but a death that is something more than death, it is the second death, the death that never dies. What a contrast there is between life and death! Yet there is not half such a contrast between life and death as between the mere act of dying and the second death, the casting into the lake of fire.

Oh, the wrath to come! the wrath to come! the wrath to come! 'Twere enough to make you start from your seats if you did but know what those four words mean. To die unrenewed, unpardoned, to face a righteously angry God, to be made the target for all His arrows, to be rent in pieces in His hot displeasure—sinner, can you bear even to think of this? Yet this is what your sickness will lead to unless the great Physician, of whom I am presently to speak, shall come and heal you.

Having been to see the patient, and having said so much concerning his disease, I wonder whether you are saying in your hearts, "If this be true, there is great need of a Physician," for if so, you have learned what is the very essence of the text. The only right a man has to Christ is his need of Him. If you have been brought into the condition I have been trying to describe, your need is extreme, and since you need the great Physician, I am glad to tell you that He is there, ready to hear you. Lay hold of Him, look to Him now. Christ Jesus is set before you in the Gospel, look to Him and live.

II. Now we are going to stop at the door of ONE WHO REFUSES TO BE CALLED A PATIENT, or to come into the list of sick folk at all.

The sick have need of a physician, but those who are whole manifestly have no such need. Are there any "whole" people? Oh, no! All have need of the great Physician, and therefore, we preach Christ to all. All are spiritually sick, and therefore, we entreat all to come unto Him who alone can heal them. But we have to deal with men as they look upon themselves, and there are some people, who think that they are not sinners, and who, therefore, do not want a Savior. Let me give you a description of some of them.

There is a good woman—probably she is here—who says, "I have brought up a large family, I am sure I was always kind to my children, my husband always said I was the best of wives, as for my neighbors, I have got up in the middle of the night to nurse them, if any of them ever had the fever, they always said, 'Send for Mrs. So-and-so, she'll come to us.' I always managed my household affairs so that I owed no man anything, everybody respects me, and I do not like being told by you, sir, that I am as bad as you say, in fact, I do not believe that I am, many people say that I am about the best-hearted person in the parish, and I think I am."

Well now, dear friend, I see that you are evidently one of these whole people, or one of those who think themselves whole. You do not need a Savior, so you shall not have one. But as you will have no Savior to take you to heaven, where will you go? Why, you and all your good works will go down to hell unless you repent of this proud way of talking, for you are rebelling against God all the while that you are speaking thus.

You have been very good to your children, well, that is right, and let your children repay you, God does not owe you anything for that. You have also been very kind to your neighbors, that is good, would that more were like you in that respect! But let your neighbors thank you, God owes you nothing for that. What did you ever do for God? Why, you have never done anything for Him since He made you! You preferred your children to Him, and you thought it better to live to serve your neighbors than to live to serve your God!

Oh, dear! what does all your fine righteousness prove to be as soon as we examine it? It is filthy rags, so throw it away, for as long as you cling to it, you practically say that you have no need of a Savior, and having no need of a Savior, Christ does not come to you.

I also know a good many people of the other sex, every one of whom says, "I never will believe that my nature is so bad as you say it is. I do not doubt that with some convicts, or other thoroughly bad-hearted fellows, it is as you say, but I do not believe that what you have said is true of all of us. Just look at me, sir, I have large premises in the city, I like to conduct my business in an honorable manner, nobody can say that I am overreaching.

I have an old clerk, sir, who has worked for me for thirty years, ask him whether I am not as kind a master as can be, my people at home like me very much, I subscribe to the Bible Society, I give a couple of guineas a year to a Ragged School, I have been in the habit of going to church or chapel ever since I was a lad, I do not know that anybody can say much against me. I may have had a little too much wine after dinner once or twice, but there, that is nothing remarkable, everybody does that sometimes, so, sir, I can say that your representation of me is not true."

Very well, friend, I will take you at your own valuation. It seems, then, that you have no need of a physician, so Christ's coming into the world could not have had any relation to you. Suppose you could get to heaven on your theory, do you know what they would have to do for you? Why, they would have to build a new heaven on purpose for you, because all the people who have ever entered there say, "We have washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." But there is no need to wash what is clean already, and your robes are, it seems, so uncommonly clean that they need no washing.

If you could get into heaven as you are, you would be able to sing to your own praise, and glory forever! But to tell you the truth, you will never get there as you are, for the only footing on which a man can go to heaven is that of a humble acceptance of God's grace. Now, you are not humble. What you have just said proves to me that you are as proud as Lucifer, and certainly, you have not a right estimate of sin, or you would not have said, just now, "I have only done what everybody else does." Does it make a thing less sinful because everybody does it?

It appears to me, dear friend, that you do not know much about yourself, and that if you would spend half as much time in the stock-taking of your own character as you do in the stock-taking up at those large premises in the city of which you are so proud, you would soon discover that you are spiritually bankrupt, that you cannot pay a single penny in the pound, much less twenty shillings, that you have forgotten God up to this very day, that you have trampled on the blood of Christ by insisting upon it, that you do not need it, that you have insulted divine wisdom by saying that it has provided what you do not require, that you have insulted divine justice and truth, for both of these denounce you and condemn you, and yet you say you do not deserve condemnation.

O man, the poorest soul that is trembling at the feet of Christ is in a more hopeful state than you are, with all your morality, and all your boasted righteousness! Your only right to Christ lies in your need of Christ, but according to your description of yourself, you evidently do not feel that you need Him. Very well, then, you have no right to Him, and if you remain as you are, you will certainly perish in your sin.

Possibly someone else says, "Ah, sir, I do not trust in my good works, for I have something better to trust to. When I was quite a little one, I was taken to church, and the parson put some water on my face—I do not know whether there is anything about that in the Bible, by the way—and that made me 'a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven'—at least, so the Catechism says, and a long while after that, I went to the church again, and a bishop put his hands on my head—I do not know what it all meant, and I had never felt anything very particular, and then they told me to come to the communion, and I did, and nobody ever refused me.

I have heard that there is a great deal of meaning in coming to the sacrament, and I intend, when I get ill, to look into these matters a little more, but for the present, I am quite satisfied with what our clergyman tells me. They do say that he is bit of a Puseyite, but we need not bother our heads about that, if we attend to the ordinances of the church, I daresay it will be all right with us."

Well friend, let me tell you plainly, in the name of the Most High, that your refuge is a refuge of lies, and your confidence is a deception. If I speak to others of you, and you tell me that you were immersed, according to the apostolic fashion, and that you come and commune at the Lord's table, and that you are trusting in this for salvation, I would say the same to you, that your hope is equally a lie.

*“Not all the outward forms on earth,
Nor rites that God has given,
Nor will of man, nor blood, nor birth,
Can raise a soul to heaven.”*

If you rest on these things, and think that you are whole as the result of having done so, then you practically say that you have no need of a physician, and consequently, you have no claim upon Him for His aid. O brethren, our plea with Christ must be our wounds! That is His plea with His Father, His wounds, and that must be our plea with Him—our sins, our needs, our unrighteousness—not our goodness, nor our resolves to be better—this is what we must bring before the Lord.

But I am quite conscious, though I try to describe their cases as clearly as I can, that some who think themselves whole, will still escape. One will say, “The preacher could not mean me.” Perhaps your character has been accurately sketched, yet you say, “The preacher could not mean me, I am such an honest and upright man, do you mean to tell me, sir, that I am to be saved in the same way as a chimney-sweep or a poor fallen woman?” Yes, that is exactly what I do mean, and there is no other way to heaven for you than there is for such people as you have mentioned. You must come just as the vilest of the vile come, just as empty handed as they come, you also must come to Christ, and if you do so, He will receive you.

III. Our time has flown so rapidly that I can only speak briefly of THE PHYSICIAN.

If anyone asks, “What is His diploma?” it is here, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted.” God the Father sent Him to heal sin-sick souls. Where did He study? He studied in the great hospital of human disease. For thirty-three years, “He went about doing good.”

What practice has He had? He has had the most extensive practice that a physician could have. Millions of happy souls above have been cured by Him, and millions here on earth have also been healed by Him, and all of them will gladly speak His praises.

If you want to know what His medicine is, I may tell you that He has two medicines. This is one, “He sent his word, and healed them”—His word of promise, His word of invitation, His word of command. But He has also another medicine, that is, His own blood. Unlike other physicians, who give bitter potions to their patients, the great Physician drank all the medicine Himself.

But you will ask, “What is His fee? He gives healing “without money and without price.” You may ask, “Where is His dispensary?” To every creature under heaven who trusts Him, Christ presents a free and complete cure. And you will ask, “What are His hours? Any hour, and every hour, by night or by day. But you will say, “Where can I find Him?” Just wherever you are sitting or standing now, you can find Him if you will but breathe this prayer, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” If you trust Him with your soul, then the honor of this great Physician is engaged to make a sure and certain cure of you. Blessed Physician, would that we had time and ability to speak of Thee and of the wonders Thou hast wrought! You can heal the vilest, the most diseased, the most helpless and hopeless of sinners.

I want to conclude by earnestly inviting you to come to this great Physician at once. I know that many of you will say that you are unworthy. That is true, but no one was ever saved because he was worthy. Even though you are unworthy, have you not a need of a Savior? And being conscious of such a need is all the fitness and worthiness He requires. If you need Christ, you are fit to come to Christ. If you need to have sin forgiven, you are a fit subject for Christ to deal with, you need not talk about your unworthiness, for Christ bids you come unto Him.

Possibly you say that your case is such a very complicated one that you do not understand it yourself, but He understands it. You cannot tie a knot of sin which Christ cannot untie. Christ can cure your disease whatever it is, even if it has become chronic with you. Christ can cure habitual sinners. He can cure the sin that was born with you, and He can do it this very hour. He can make the drunkard sober in a moment, He can turn the very chief of transgressors from the error of his ways, and set his feet in the right path, and that in a moment.

The sin of twice ten thousand years—if it could be possible for anyone to have sinned so long—He can take away in a moment when we believe on Him. “Well, but,” says one, “I am such an old sinner.” I have read that a young lad, of the age of fifteen, heard Mr. Flavel preach, and soon after, he removed to America, and settled in a quiet village there. He lived eighty-five years after that, an unconverted man, and one day, sitting in the field, thinking, he recollected Mr. Flavel’s sermon, and the earnest way in which he spoke.

Old men often remember the things of their youth better than those of yesterday. What Mr. Flavel had preached, eighty-five years before, was blessed to that sinner over a hundred years old, and he sought and found mercy, and he lived some years after that to tell what divine love and faithfulness could do. You are not a hundred yet, but if you had wasted a whole century in sin, God’s grace could enable you to begin another century walking in the paths of righteousness to your life’s end.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

LUKE 5:1-32

Verses 1-2. *And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.*

Before folding them up, as if they intended to do no more with them just then, as they had been working all night in vain.

3. *And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land.*

It is very difficult to speak effectively when the people come too close to the speaker, and sometimes, a little inconvenience like that may interfere with the flow of the speaker’s thoughts and words. Even the Savior seems to have felt that He needed a little breathing space between Himself and His audience.

3. *And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.*

That was what some people would have called an unconsecrated place, but Christ’s presence consecrated it, as it does every place where He condescends to meet with us.

*“Where’re we seek Him, He is found,
And every place is hallowed ground.”*

4. *Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.*

Whenever He borrows a pulpit, or anything else, He pays good interest for the loan. Christ will not be in even a boatman’s debt. For every cup of cold water given to His disciples in His name the Master will take care to pay.

5. *And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.*

Out of personal respect and obedience to Christ, having perhaps but a slender hope of any good coming of it, yet, nevertheless, he will let down the net.

6-7. *And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them.*

For they had launched out so far into the sea as scarcely to be within hearing, so they beckoned to their partners in the other ship, and they rowed out to them.

7. *And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.*

We can have too much of a good thing, aye, too much even of the best things, for our poor frail vessel cannot hold all that God would be willing to put into it.

8. *When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*

Not knowing what he said, though he knew what he meant, feeling as if he, so sinful, had come too close to the Lord who was so gracious, so he must not dare to keep near Him. Have you never felt the same as that? If not, I think you have neither known your Lord, nor yet yourselves, for the knowledge of Christ, combined with the knowledge of ourselves, is sure to produce this holy shrinking, in which we have no need for anyone to say to us, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet," for we are almost ready to put off our very body, for we can scarcely bear the glory of the presence of the Lord.

9-10. *For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: and so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.*

He seemed to imply that he should catch them after the same rate too, and so he did, for the first throw of the net brought in three thousand, and very soon the number caught was increased to five thousand. That was good fishing by those first Gospel fishermen, oh, that we could throw the net as they did!

11-12. *And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him. And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy:*

That is a characteristic touch of Luke, who, as a physician, with a glance of his eye, took in the condition of the man, not as merely a leper, but as one "full of leprosy."

12-13. *Who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And he put forth his hand, and touched him,—*

The perfectly pure One touched the leprous man without Himself becoming contaminated. In any other case, the man who touched a leper would have been defiled, but when Christ comes into contact with impurity, He is not defiled, but He removes it. This is what the Gospel is meant to do to the world. We are to go and seek the good of the most fallen and abandoned of men, and those who do so, ought to have so much of the spirit of Jesus Christ in them, and so much vitality in their piety, that they will not be tempted by the sin upon which they look, but on the contrary, will overcome that sin, and impart spiritual health instead of receiving infection. May we be in such a state of health as Jesus was! Then shall we be able to touch the leper, and not be defiled. Jesus touched him,—

13. *Saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him.*

Ask Him to touch you also, poor leprous soul, you who are full of sin, you who are deeply conscious that the deadly disease of sin is upon you incurably. Ask Him but to touch you, for the touch of His finger shall make you clean in a moment. Christ's cures are often instantaneous. He, who could speak a world into being with a word, can also speak a man into perfect spiritual sanity with a word.

14-15. *And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him:*

Some fires burn the more fiercely for being damped, and such was the fame of Christ, it was not to be kept under. The more He bade men be quiet, "so much the more went there a fame abroad of Him."

15. *And great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities.*

Two words that I long to see linked together in this house, "to hear, and to be healed by him." You come to hear, can you not also come "to be healed by him of your infirmities"?

16. *And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.*

The tense of the verb implies that He often did this, it was His habit to withdraw Himself for private prayer even in His busiest times, and when He could occupy every minute with great advantage to the people. Thus He gathered new strength from above for each day's work, and when there was most to be done, then He took most time to pray. It is an evil economy that tries to take time for other things that should be spent in prayer, for the shortening of prayer will be the weakening of our power.

17. *And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.*

Not the Pharisees and doctors of the law, they do not often get healed by Christ, but “the power of the Lord was present to heal” the multitude. The only people for whom there seems to be no power to heal are these Pharisees and doctors, as will appear by the following narrative.

18. *And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy:*

He had had a stroke of paralysis.

18-19. *And they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop,—*

By the external staircase,—

19. *And let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus.*

Probably into the courtyard of the house where Jesus was preaching.

20. *And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.*

Laying the axe at the root—not healing the paralysis at first, but forgiving the sin which depressed the man's spirit, and so was, in a measure, the cause of the paralysis. By removing the sin, He raised the man's spirits, and with his renewed spirits, there came back strength.

Note that it was when He saw their faith that He said unto the man, “Thy sins are forgiven thee.”

21. *And the scribes and the Pharisees—*

Here they are, these caviling gentlemen, these Pharisees and doctors of the law—

21-23. *Began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?*

He that could do the one could do the other. He who bids the paralyzed man walk is divine, He, therefore, can forgive sin.

24-26. *But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day.*

May we often see such “strange things” spiritually!

27-32. *And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But the scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

The murmuring of those Pharisees and doctors of the law had one good result, for it led the Savior to declare the purpose of His mission to the earth, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

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