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“Who Does He Think He Is?” Week #3

Sickness is something we all deal with. Everyone at some point gets sick. Can you remember the last time that you were sick? Maybe it was one of those chest colds that hangs around for weeks, despite multiple doses of mucinex and Nyquil. Or maybe it was a case of the flu. That’s always fun. The fever, the chills, the nausea, the fatigue. Good times. Or maybe you have experience with something more serious. Multiple sclerosis. Cancer. Parkinson’s. Alzheimer’s. Diabetes. From a stubborn cold that won’t go away to something that threatens your life, sickness is something we all experience.

And our response to sickness is always the same, isn’t it? If I could just get better. You don’t have time to be sick, do you? Neither do I. If I could just get better, I could get back to “normal” life. If I could just go back to the way things were before I was sick. If I could just get better, then I could function again. If I could just get better, then I could stop hurting. If I could just get better, then I could go back to work. If I could just get better, then I could get my life back.

Now try to imagine being sick, not for a day, not for a week, not for a month, but for 38 years. 38 years. That’s a long time to be sick. But in the Gospel of John, we meet a man with precisely that problem. We don’t learn his name. We don’t learn how he became sick. What we learn are two important details. One, this man has been sick, lame, unable to walk for 38 years. Helpless. Paralyzed. Chronically, insurmountably sick. And two, this man desperately wants to be well. I would imagine that every day, for the 38 years that this man had suffered from sickness, he had said the same thing. If I could just get better. Every day, this sick and

tired man lay by the pool at Bethesda, believing that the only thing that could heal him was a miracle.

Getting well requires a doctor. Sometimes years of medicine. Or, in the mind of the lame man, it would require an angel from heaven. The sick and the ill would gather by the pool of Bethesda because they believed that an angel stirred the water, and if they could get in while the angel was stirring, they could get better. But instead of an angel, after 38 years of sickness, what the man received was a simple question from a man he had never met. A common man. A carpenter. A stranger to the lame man. Seeing the man suffering in sickness, this common stranger walked straight up to the lame man and asked a straightforward, simple question. Do you want to get better?

Can you imagine what the lame man must have thought? Who does this man think he is? Of course I want to get better! Every day for 38 years I’ve wanted to get better! If only I could get better, if only, but I can’t!

“Get up and walk.” These are the words from the stranger.

Get up and walk? Don’t you think that I want to? Don’t you think I want to get better? Are you mocking me? I won’t get better; I can’t get better. Who do you think you are?

The stranger is Jesus. Who does he think he is? This is not an ordinary man. This is the very son of God, sent from heaven. He carries in his mouth the word of God. The words that he brings make alive what was once dead. Dead tissue. Dead organs. Dead limbs. Dead muscles. The words of Jesus bring to life to the lame man’s dead legs. And for the first time in 38 years, the lame man stands on strong legs, and takes his first steps. Finally, finally, I’m better.

It might be easy to stop here. After all, this is a miracle. Jesus has just shown the lame man and us exactly who he is. But sickness doesn’t only affect the body. You see, my

friends, there is a sickness that's more serious than any physical illness we could experience. The mortality rate is 100%. This sickness kills 100% of the time. The symptoms are variable, but the entire person is affected, down to their core. No vaccination, no antibiotic will cure it. You can't even put it into remission. It's worse than a cold, the flu, malaria, cancer, diabetes, or AIDS. This is the sickness that infects all mankind. And we see its affects everywhere. Broken families. Countries torn apart by war. Drug addiction. Sex trafficking. Theft. Murder. It is an epidemic of unprecedented proportions, and every single person is infected. Our lame man in the story is infected. I'm infected. Brothers and sisters, each and every one of you is infected. The diagnosis is certain. We're infected with sin.

And how often do we take our sin sickness as seriously as our physical sickness? We spend countless dollars on health care every year, looking for a thousand cures for a thousand sicknesses, each of us saying if I could just get better, but how often do we take our sin that seriously? Let me ask you an honest question. It's the same one that Jesus asked the lame man in our story. Do you want to get better? Some people don't. Maybe that's you. Sin is an easy thing to get comfortable with. Oh, it isn't that bad. My gossiping never killed anyone. What I do in the privacy of my own home is no one's business but mine. A little dishonesty here and there is unavoidable if you want to get ahead. Image and status matter more than devotion to God and family. My friends, if that's you today, then you haven't understood the severity of the sickness inside of you.

Sin is never something that we should be comfortable with. We should be as horrified by it as we are by cancer. The consequence is always the same. There are no survivors. The wages of sin are death. Eternal separation from the love of God.

But perhaps you've caught a glimpse of just how bad sin is. Maybe you've felt the impact

of sin in your own life. Maybe it's destroyed a marriage, or torn apart friendships. Maybe it's driven a wedge between you and your kids, or you and your parents. Or maybe on a personal level, each and every day you try your best to measure up, and you simply can't do it. Or maybe you've just taken the diagnosis of sin seriously, and you desperately want to get better. Maybe you're saying to yourself if only I could get better.

If that's you, then you've been diagnosed correctly. And guess what? There's universal health care for this particular sickness. It's open to all people, everywhere, no matter how severe the sickness. This cure is 100% effective, 100% of the time. There's no waiting list or crowded office to sit through. There are no forms to fill out, no claims to file. It's free. It costs you nothing. The only cure for the infection of sin is the blood of the lamb. The only remedy is Jesus. On the cross, Jesus suffered more sickness and sin than we could experience in a thousand years. He took that sickness into himself, and now you're purified, clean. Jesus bore our sorrows and carried our sicknesses, living a perfect life before God for our sake. Who does he think he is? He is the only cure for the toxic infection of sin. His gift of Baptism disinfects our hearts of sin. His body and blood in Holy Communion sooth our hearts ravaged by the guilt of sin. The words of life and promise that he speaks to us in his word declare to us that we are cured. Yes, you can get better. All it takes is faith in Jesus. Faith is taking Jesus at his word when he calls you forgiven. And because of your faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, you are better. Getting better means your sins are forgiven, right here, right now. Getting better means experiencing the love of Jesus in your own life, right here, right now. Who does he think he is? He is the perfect remedy, the perfect medicine, the perfect cure for our sin sickness. In the name of Jesus, Amen.