

# Jesus and Sickness

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Please open your Bible to the book of Matthew 9, or turn to page \_\_\_\_ in the Bible under the chair in front of you. Here we find Matthew continuing to show us who this Jesus is and what He came to do. Since the beginning of chapter 8, we've seen Jesus heal a leper, a paralyzed servant from a distance, and Peter's mother-in-law. He's calmed a storm and cast out demons. He's healed a paralytic.

He's been doing all of these signs and wonders to show us His authority, to confirm that He is the long-awaited Messiah, and that He has come to show mercy and save His people.

And now here, in this section of chapter 9, we will see more of the same. Matthew is intentionally re-telling the stories of particular miracles. And he has chosen these particular miracles for a purpose. Hundreds of years before Jesus arrived on the scene, a prophet arose among God's people by the name of Isaiah. And he wrote during a troubled time in Israel's history, a time when there was not a lot of hope – the foreign powers of Assyria and Babylon and Egypt were warring and Israel was caught in the middle. They were soon to be conquered and carried off into exile.

And during that time, this prophet of God arose to call God's people to return to Him and to trust that there was coming an anointed one (that's what the word 'Messiah' means) who would restore God's kingdom. And how would they know the Messiah has come? Listen to the words of Isaiah 35...

## **Isaiah 35:5-6**

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

This is how they would know that the kingdom has come. It's no accident that Matthew highlights these particular miracle stories as he recounts the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus opens the eyes of the blind, heals the mute and deaf, and makes the lame to walk again so that He might show He is this long awaited King, who has come to save His people from their sins. So listen as I read our text for us this morning.

Read **Matthew 9:18-34**

I want to begin this morning by recommending a resource to you that I came across in my preparation. I believe it'll be helpful. It's written by a man named J.C. Ryle who was born in 1816 (the same year Indiana became a state) and who died in 1900. So it's an older booklet. But I've found that sometimes the most helpful things for our culture are those things written outside of it, either from around the world or long ago.

Well, this was written long ago. But I think it'll be helpful for you. It's a paper, about 14 pages front and back, and it's simply called "Sickness." In it, he has three points: The universal prevalence of sickness and disease, the general benefits of sickness in our lives, and the special duties that sickness calls from us. And so we want to make it available to you.

So if any of the following applies to you, then I want to recommend it to you:

- If you have ever been sick
- If you are currently sick (from colds to cancer)
- If someone you love is dealing with sickness
- If you think that you or someone you love might ever have to deal with sickness
- Or, if you think that someday you might die

If you're in any of those categories, I want to commend this paper to you. It's about how a Christian might think about and prepare for times of sickness, how to understand the Lord's work in it, and how we might even help one another as we walk through times of sickness in one another's lives.

So, we have made a limited number of physical copies available in the back. But if you are able, I want to encourage you to just take a picture of this QR code [\(show picture\)](#) which will take you to a link where you can download a copy of it for free, made available by another church in Florida. Or you may be able to simply google "JC Ryle Sickness" and you will likely be able to find it that way as well.



So maybe you're thinking, "Why are you talking about this old booklet?"

Well, this passage is obviously addressing the subject of sickness and disability and even death. And I believe that the Lord wants us to be thinking about and determining to put into practice what He teaches us in His Word every time that we open it together. So we are always seeking to understand what the Bible says and also how we are to respond.

So you might say, we're basically asking two questions of the text – what? And so what? What is this passage teaching? And so what? What difference should that make in my life?

And so that's how I want to approach this final triad of healing stories that Matthew gives us. These final three stories – which is really four – all come together and highlight for us a truth that we've seen over and over in these last couple chapters:

### **Jesus has authority over sickness and death.**

Matthew has been showing us the power and authority of Jesus over nature and the weather, over demonic forces, over the direction of our lives, and last week even the authority He has to forgive sins.

And now, as he draws this section to a close, he has chosen to tell us these particular stories to highlight the authority of Jesus over sickness and death. And that truth is immediately relevant to us, of course, because all of us will one day die. There is no escaping that truth. Unless the Lord comes back first, we will all face death. You will not live forever on this earth. If you're a young person, this is true for you. If you're a bit older, this is still true for you, though you probably feel it a bit more. One day you will die. And in this fallen world, we will all succumb at various times to sickness and disease and disability along the way.

And I hope that this isn't news for you. This has been true for all humans, all over the world since Adam and Eve fell in the Garden. So these people here, in this little town of Capernaum around AD 30, they would have been aware of this as well. They had lived their lives under the shadow of the fear of death as well. In fact, given their state of medicine and sanitary practices in that day, they were likely more aware of this reality of sickness and death than we often are.

Jesus comes and He says, there is something I want you to know. But in order for you to know it, I want to show something to you. And so he has been going around preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing people. Remember that's what Matthew has been trying to show us since chapter four. Let me remind us what we read there...

**Matthew 4:23**

And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

So this is what Jesus is doing. He's seeking to show us that Jesus is absolutely in charge of everything. He is God in the flesh, the King over all and has authority over all things. He owns the power to overturn and restore every disease and sickness, even death itself is powerless before Him. Jesus is absolutely in charge.

So let's look at these stories. At the beginning of our passage, we find Jesus at the house of Matthew feasting at a meal with all kinds of people, including sinners and tax collectors. And there in the crowds are some who are opposed to Him, some Pharisees. And Jesus has been engaging in conversations about showing mercy and fasting, and right in the middle of that conversation, Matthew tells us, there comes this man. And he's not just any man, he's an important man – a ruler.

We know from the parallel accounts in Mark and Luke that this man's name is Jarius, and he's a ruler in the synagogue. He would have been like a super-deacon among God's people there in Capernaum. He's almost certainly a Pharisee himself.

And he comes, and he finds Jesus, and he kneels before him. He's not worshipping; it's a sign of respect. And this likely would have taken the crowds aback. Here comes this important religious figure, the kind of person who has been opposed to Jesus, and he walks up to Him and kneels down makes a humble request of him.

He tells Jesus, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay hands on her, and she will live." The reputation that Jesus has for healing many people like we read about in chapter four has come to this man, and now that it's his own daughter, he's desperate for help. So he makes his way to Jesus and makes this audacious request – will you lay your hands on my daughter so that she will live?

And so Jesus agree and then while they're on the way to this man's house, a woman makes her way through the crowd and touches the fringe of his garment. Apparently, she too had heard about Jesus. She sees her opportunity. And she presses through in order to get close to Jesus.

And like the ruler, she is desperate for help. She's been suffering for a long time, dealing with the pain and embarrassment that her bleeding causes. She is not even allowed in the temple for worship because of her condition. This bleeding issue she has keeps her from normal life. It likely makes it hard for her to make a living or be married. She was likely unable to have children. The other accounts tell us that she has spent all of the money she had on doctors who have been unable to help her. And she's been dealing with all of this for twelve years. That's a long time.

Where were you twelve years ago? What was going on in your life?

I was living in Louisville, Kentucky attending seminary classes in the evenings while I worked 50 hours a week at a job I hated. My daughter Annie would have been just a baby. Eve would have been pregnant with our son James. Thinking back twelve years – that's a long time.

So imagine that every day from that time until now, you have been dealing with an unwanted medical condition, and it's caused you discomfort and shame. It's isolated you from friends and family. That's what this woman has been struggling with. And so she is desperate for help.

In many ways, she is in the opposite situation from the ruler of the synagogue. He is important, she is not. He is respected by many in the community, she is unclean. He's at the top of the social ladder, she's at the bottom.

But both of them recognize that they need Jesus. And they believe He can help.

So as Jesus and the disciples make there way to the house of Jairus, this woman comes to touch the fringe of his garment, probably the tassels worn to remind a person of the holiness of God in keeping with the Law of Moses.

She is desperate here. She's not supposed to be out in a crowd lest she makes others unclean. And she's certainly not supposed to be reaching out and touching someone on purpose. But she does. And she tells herself, "If I can only touch him, then I'll be made well." And so she reaches out and touches just the fringe of his garment.

It's an act of faith. She believes that Jesus can heal her. And Jesus stops and turns toward her. Look at how this interaction is described...

**Matthew 9:22**

Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well.

Just picture this in your mind's eye: Jesus pauses in this crowd. He turns toward the woman. He gives attention to her when she has spent so long being overlooked and unheard. And He sees her. He locks eyes with her, and he speaks. Perhaps very gently. "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well."

This is the only time when Jesus addresses someone as daughter. And it's for this precious woman. You may feel like an outcast. You may feel unseen. But I see you, Jesus says. You're my precious daughter. I see you. I know you. So take heart. Be encouraged. That faith you have, it brought you to me. And I have made you well.

Has there ever been someone like Jesus? King Jesus, the one who has authority over all things is not only powerful. He is kind. He is good. He sees. And He cares.

I don't know what she did in response. Perhaps she just stood there amazed. In an instant her life has been changed. She has been made well. And it's worded in such a way that implies this isn't just a temporary fix – she's been cured.

Why do you think Jesus did this in this way? Why does Matthew interrupt the story of the ruler's daughter to tell us about the healing of this bleeding woman?

Maybe think about it from the perspective of this ruler. You see, all the while, while all of this is happening, this man Jairus has been right there, watching all of this unfold. It's his daughter who has died, and he has just seen Jesus call this woman 'daughter' and

restore her to life. He must feel as if his whole world is crumbling, but Jesus wants to show him something so that he might draw out faith in his heart.

One author wrote,

*"Jesus was asking him to keep believing in his power to heal despite the situation. In other words, it was as if Jesus was telling Jairus, 'You have seen what I can do in a hopeless situation. I have healed someone who was as good as dead. Keep believing that I can do the same in your hopeless situation. Keep believing that I can heal your daughter who is dead.'"*<sup>1</sup>

You believe Jairus. Keep believing. Hold on to your faith. Persevere. Hold fast.

That's a good word for us today as we think about our own struggles with pain, sickness, disease, or disability. Don't give up. Hold fast. Cling to Jesus. There is always hope because Jesus can change your circumstances in an instant.

Well this interaction Jesus has with this woman prepares Jairus and us for what happens when Jesus finally makes it to his house. There, He is at once confronted with all of this spectacle and mourning over the death of this girl. As was the custom, there were hired professionals mourning and playing flutes and making a great commotion. But Jesus isn't impressed by any of that.

And He tells them, verse 24,

**Matthew 9:24**

he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him.

Jesus tells them to leave. Go away. She is not dead but sleeping. And they laugh at him. Why do they laugh? Because they know that she's really dead. They think Jesus is out of His mind.

But is Jesus confused? No. He knows that she's dead. Later in chapter 11, the disciples of John ask Jesus if He's the Messiah, and He replies...

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<sup>1</sup> Chris H. Hulshof, *Jesus and Disability*, 71

### **Matthew 11:4-5**

And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: **5** the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them

He could only be talking about this little girl here. So Jesus knows that she’s dead. But He is emphasizing how powerless death is before Him. Before Jesus, death is just like sleep. This little girl is really dead, but she won’t be for long.

But the crowds there don’t believe. They laugh at Him. They think, “Oh this great healer is here, but He’s too late.”

But then Jesus puts the crowd outside. Their lack of faith means that they won’t get to see what He’s about to do. He goes in to the house, and he takes this little girl by the hand and the girl arose. She is resurrected to life again. And the report about what happened goes everywhere. Of course, it would be hard to contain news like that.

So Matthew has shown us the power Jesus has to bring hope and life to desperate situations. He continues on in the next two sections.

In verses 17-31, Jesus is once again followed by people in desperate need.

### **Matthew 9:27**

And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, “Have mercy on us, Son of David.”

So these two blind men call out to Jesus, and they call Him the Son of David. It’s rare for Jesus to be recognized with that title. These guys are unique in seeing Jesus as the Son of David here. But Matthew himself used that description back in the very first verse of this book.

### **Matthew 1:1**

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

And as we said way back around Christmastime when we looked at that passage, this title is deliberate. It’s a reference that the people in that day would have clearly understood. To be called the Son of David meant that this person was the fulfillment of

a string of prophecies that anticipated the return of the King. There was a King promised from the line of David who would restore God's people and rule over an everlasting Kingdom. And of course, these blind men see Jesus correctly. He is the long-awaited King, the true Son of David.

And so Jesus goes with these men into the house, away from the crowds, and He asks them, "Do you believe I am able to do this?" He wants to draw out their faith. And they say, "Yes, Lord." So He touches their eyes and says, "According to your faith be it done to you." That's an awkward statement in English. It essentially means, as you have believed, so let it be.

Sometimes this phrase has been misapplied to mean – Jesus will heal if your faith is strong enough. That's not what is being said here. It's not that Jesus is compelled to heal these men because their faith demanded it. No, it's that the very presence of faith connects them to Jesus who has the power and authority and the freedom to heal as He desires.

Once again, Jesus shows His power over this disability of blindness and brings healing in an instant. Their eyes are opened, and they can see. It's a miracle. Their lives are forever changed because they trusted in Jesus.

But Jesus gives them a curious instruction – I don't want you to tell anyone. Why does He say this? It seems most likely that Jesus doesn't want fame merely because of His miracles. Yes, Jesus has compassion on the sick and oppressed. But He has ultimately come to save people from their sins. That's His ultimate aim, not to become popular with the crowds.

But they don't listen and they spread His fame throughout the whole area. Then Jesus leaves, and as He goes, another disabled man is brought to Him. The man cannot talk, and may have been deaf as well. And this time, the cause of His disability is said to be demon-oppression. Our world is a spiritual world, and there are fallen angels who do seek to oppress and harm people.

But just as Jesus has power over disease and death, so too does He have power over demons. And when Jesus cast out the demon, the man is able to speak once again.

And the reaction of the crowd is astonishment. They say, “Never was anything like this seen in Israel.” There have been wonders done among God’s people, some of them recorded in the Old Testament, but nothing compares to the power and authority of this man Jesus.

But the Pharisees refuse to believe. They cannot deny the power in front of them, so they instead seek to discredit Jesus by claiming He only has power through the prince of demons, Satan himself. Again, the tension is building in their opposition to Jesus.

Matthew has clearly shown us the absolute authority Jesus has over all things. The ancient enemies of mankind – nature, demons, sickness, even death itself – they all must cower before the absolute authority of Jesus. He is in charge.

But let me give you a pastoral word: these stories aren’t here to guarantee that this is what will happen when we are sick. Can Jesus heal you? Absolutely. He can. And if Jesus chooses to heal, then rejoice at the power and kindness of His will.

But that’s not what these stories are here to show us. They have been written for us to show us who Jesus is and what He has ultimately come to do. Jesus has authority over all things, and He now calls all people to trust in His life, death, and resurrection. Ultimately, these healing stories are signs that point to the greater healing that is possible when sinners put their trust in Jesus for salvation. That’s what Matthew wants us to see.

And in the meantime, what are we supposed to do? How do we answer the ‘so what?’ question in this passage? Let me give you three applications and a final exhortation.

### **Persevere in Hope**

First, because Jesus has authority over disease and death, we can persevere in hope!

Now, I don’t mean just try to stay positive or wish for the best. We have real, substantial hope in the midst of suffering and pain, even when we’re facing disease and disability and death, because Jesus is able.

Remember, Jesus had the blind men answer Him out loud, “Do you believe that He is able to heal?” So maybe you need to ask yourself, do you believe that Jesus is able to heal and restore you? Do you believe that He has that authority? That He is able?

Don’t lose hope. Not even death can stop Jesus. Death is just like sleep to Him. So don’t give in to cynicism or doubt – put your hope in the one who has the power to save.

And persevere in that hope! Remember how the ruler has come to Jesus for healing for His daughter, but then they’re interrupted by this woman with a bleeding condition? The point is that Jesus wanted this man to hold fast to Him, even when His world was falling apart.

So this is a word for us today. We live in a world surrounded by disease and hardship and even death. But don’t lose heart. Keep believing. Hold tight to the One who is able to bring light to the darkness and life where there is only death.

Maybe you came to church today and you needed to be reminded of this Word from the Lord – hold on. Persevere. Hold fast to the Lord.

There is no diagnosis, no disability, no disease that is beyond His reach. So take heart! Keep on believing! And celebrate the wonder and goodness that the God who created you, sees you, and loves you, and has your ultimate joy in His good plan. And if he brings healing, then rejoice and be glad! These are wondrous stories here of the amazing kindness and mercy of Jesus as He brings healing to the broken.

Brothers and sisters, don’t let your familiarity with these stories rob you of wonder at the miracle of instantaneous healing. Jesus has absolute authority to heal and restore and save. So rejoice! Hold on to hope. Be glad that even in the midst of sickness and sorrow, Jesus has the power to overthrow sin and death.

### **Follow Jesus into the Margins**

Secondly, we should follow Jesus into the margins. Over and over in these chapters, we have seen Jesus move toward the outcasts, the overwhelmed, and the overlooked. Again and again, we see the messiah move into the margins and do miracles of mercy. I’m like a poet and don’t know it... ☺

Jesus cares about those who are hurting and struggling. He cares for people who are disabled and unable to participate in the normal rhythms of life. And Jesus wants us to do the same. Last week, He told the Pharisees to go and learn what this means, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.”

What does it mean for you to show mercy in your life? Who are those on the edges and the fringes who may be easily overlooked? Do you think there might be people whom God has put in your life just to see if you’ll show mercy in their time of need? Wouldn’t that be just like God to do something like that?

I think that’s a good question for us to consider as a church. Are we willing to follow Jesus into the margins? Are we pursuing those who need Jesus but may not be able to come to our worship services due to a physical struggle or disability? It’s not a secret that our building with all of its stairs and like two bathrooms for three hundred people and like five parking spots – it’s got some issues.

So are we willing to show love for the stranger, to make sacrifices so that there’s more room at the table for others? We’re working on plans to try to address some of these concerns, but frankly, it might take a bit of time. So in the meantime, are we willing to pursue those who may struggle to be here consistently or at all?

And I’m talking to myself as much as anyone here. The Bible tells those who are sick to call the elders for prayer. One of our tasks as shepherds is to care for the sheep, to pray for you, to look after the sick and vulnerable. And sometimes, those are the people who don’t necessarily shout for attention from the margins.

You know, honestly, one of the struggles that we have as pastors and as a church family is trying to keep up with the needs and burdens that our church family has. Often we can point to our small groups as the way that our body cares for one another. But you know, there is a lot of room for growth for our church family in this way, even among our small groups.

I just want to be frank with you – is that ok? Many of you do a great job of reaching out, listening well for the needs of others and moving in compassion to meet those needs.

But there are many people in our family who are carrying burdens and long for someone to reach out, spend time with them, to help them, and let them know that God loves them.

So are we willing to follow Jesus into the margins, to take the time to learn about and seek to love and serve those in need?

### **Trust Him with our Weakness**

Finally, I believe this passage invites us to consider this question: How do we trust Him with our weakness? What does it look like to live with confidence knowing that Jesus has the authority over disease and death? How does that shape our life now knowing that we will all face disease and death one day?

JC Ryle in that paper I recommended earlier, he raises that same question. I want to read an extended portion for us. He writes...

I ask you, "What will you do when you are ill? The time must come when you, as well as others, must go down the dark valley of the shadow of death. The hour must come when you, like all your forefathers, must sicken and die. The time may be near or far off, God only knows. But whenever the time may be, I ask again, What are you going to do? Where do you mean to turn for comfort? On what do you mean to rest your soul? On what do you mean to build your hope? From whence will you fetch your consolations?

If you were going to live forever in this world, I would not address you as I do. But it cannot be. There is no escaping the common lot of all mankind...Once more I press my question on your conscience: "What will you do when you are ill?"<sup>2</sup>

Well, the answer you give all depends on whether or not you actually believe that there is one who has authority over all disease and even death itself. And whether you have actually entrusted yourself to that one.

You see, it is possible to see all of these amazing works and still not entrust yourself to the One who did them. Over in chapter 11, we read a somber warning from Jesus. He says...**Matthew 11:20**

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<sup>2</sup> JC Ryle, "Sickness", 21-22

Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent...

And Jesus includes Capernaum among those regions who saw these mighty works and did not believe. They didn't in that day, and it's possible that you may read about these works today and not believe. And let me warn you with the words of Jesus here, you must repent and believe for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. When the word of Christ comes close, this is your opportunity to reach out in faith and take hold of Him, like the bleeding woman. This is your chance to believe like the father of this girl and call out for the Son of David to have mercy on you like these blind men. He alone can deliver you from the domain of darkness and give you life again.

So come to Him today.

And if you have entrusted yourself to Christ, then Ryle has more counsel to give us...

I conclude with a word of exhortation to all believers, which I heartily pray God to impress upon their souls. I exhort you to keep up a habit of close communion with Christ, and never to be afraid of 'going too far' in your religion. Remember this if you wish to have "great peace" in your times of sickness...The day may come when, after a long fight with disease, we shall feel that medicine can do no more, and that nothing remains but to die. What shall support us in that hour? Nothing, nothing can do it but close communion with Christ. Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, Christ putting His right arm under our heads, Christ felt to be sitting by our side—Christ alone can give us the complete victory in the last struggle.

Let us cleave to Christ more closely, love Him more heartily, live to Him more thoroughly, copy Him more exactly, confess Him more boldly, follow Him more fully. In sickness and in health, in life and in death, let us lean confidently on Him. Surely we ought to say daily with one of old, "Blessed be God for Jesus Christ!"<sup>3</sup>

Let's pray...

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<sup>3</sup> JC Ryle "Sickness" 25-28