

Sunday, January 22nd sermon: "Jesus' Compassionate Ministry -- The God of All Comforts (Pt 2)"

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS,  
by John Pittman Hey

Matthew 8:16-34; Isaiah 61

Scripture teaches us that God comforts His people. The principal manner in which God's comfort is displayed is that He takes away our sin, He pardons our iniquities, He clothes us in His righteousness, and He thereby makes peace with us.

It is an exceeding comfort that God should take away our sins, so that we might be rescued from the divine judgment we deserve.

How glorious that God should reveal that comfort in the very person of His Dear Son, incarnate in our humanity!

Jesus literally, physically, embodies that comfort long promised by God in olden times!

There is comfort in Christ's sacrifice at Calvary! We are set free from the fear of judgment, and brought before God with exceeding comforts.

Jesus Himself demonstrated that comfort in concrete ways during His ministry. He embraced the long-ago promises of God, that Messiah would preach the gospel to the poor, heal the broken hearted, preach deliverance to the captives, and recover sight for the blind.

In fact, Jesus read from that glorious passage in Isaiah 61, and appropriated those promises unto Himself, that He would bring them about.

But note well, that Christ and Isaiah promised not mere physical blessings. In fact, most of the items listed in both passages refer to spiritual healing, a change of heart, a rescue from sadness and oppression, beauty from the ashes, and praise to our God.

In fact, Isaiah concludes with this promise: all this is to the end, that His people might be called trees of righteousness, and the planting of the Lord!

Thus, we find the end of the Gospel: that those who trust in Jesus, and believe His Gospel, in the end, will be radically converted, changed, and clothed with righteousness before God, all of His doing to and upon us!

And the ultimate purpose? That God might be glorified!

God is glorified in the saving of His people! He is glorified in our conversion from poor lost men, to redeemed and sanctified people, made beautiful by the righteousness of Christ, and His cleansing blood upon us.

Indeed, it is required that Christ's ministry and work be much more than temporal, physical healing, because sickness in this life always comes again, and troubles return, and violence and repression in this world recur.

Christ's ministry must have permanent effect, He must provide eternal salvation from the problems of man, the problems of sin and unrighteousness, from which flow all the temporal physical sickness, captivity, woe, and death that hounds us.

Indeed, the conversion of sinful hearts to know and love the Lord, and to believe His promises in the Gospel, is much more astounding, much more miraculous, than mere physical healing from disease.

To be sure, Jesus begins by bearing man's sickness and sorrow, in healing them, as Matthew 8 relates, but as Isaiah foretold, He goes on to bear away our sins at the cross.

By this means, Jesus fulfills all the promises of God through Messiah, and not only the temporal blessings. That's because, by taking away our sins, He satisfies divine justice, and removes, for those who believe in Him, the ultimate purpose of sickness and death as a penalty for our sins.

Messiah's purpose is finally and fully complete when He raises all His forgiven people from the dead unto everlasting, glorious life with Him.

But in the end, the people in Jesus' day didn't value the miracles of Jesus – instead, they murdered Him on the cross.

By doing so, in their hatred and rebellion, they unwittingly offered up God's Lamb as a sacrifice for His people, by which God justifies us, and brings in for us an everlasting righteousness!

Thereby we become "the planting of the Lord, the trees of righteousness" that Isaiah foretold.

At the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus disclosed that the Gospel is for all people, while His people after the flesh will largely disown Him and refuse to follow their Messiah. Isaiah foretold that rejection as well.

Nevertheless, bringing righteousness, Christ will one day usher in an idyllic eternity over all the world, ironically, in part, because His own people after the flesh refused Him at first, and put Him to shame.

As if to pantomime this very truth, the people of Nazareth rose up in wrath, and tried to kill Jesus by throwing Him over a cliff.

Even in the face of this rejection, revealed by Christ to the prophets long before, Jesus nevertheless persevered in His ministry to bless poor

helpless people, to show His compassion, to prove His credentials as Messiah, and to proclaim His Gospel of forgiveness, cleansing, and salvation for His people.

The Gospels tell of how Jesus was moved with compassion when the poor leper came and asked Christ to heal him: "if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean!" Jesus said, "I will, be thou clean," and He touched the leper, and he was instantly healed.

When the woman with the issue of blood touched the hem of Christ's garment, and then tearfully, fearfully admitted what she had done, and how she was instantly healed, Christ said to her, "daughter, be of good comfort! Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace."

In both these cases, the uncleanness of the two people isolated them from their families, from society, and forced people to avoid and exclude them.

But as Jesus healed them with compassion, He knew that one day soon, He would die to remove the filthiness and guilt of the sin of all who trust in Him. These two sick people were examples of the great spiritual healing which Christ would later accomplish at the cross.

Better yet, Jesus raised dead people from the grave!

When Jesus passed by a funeral procession in the town of Nain, and saw a poor widow grieving the loss of her only son, He had compassion on her, implored her to weep not, and then raised her dear son up right there on the bier!

It appears that none of these people even knew Jesus! There isn't any mention of their faith, or that they asked Jesus for help.

This poor woman had no husband, and now had no son, so there was nobody around to take care of her or provide for her. She faced a life of loneliness, poverty, and danger, but Jesus had compassion on her!

All of these miracles by Jesus were merely a foretaste, a faint impression, of God's great compassion in Jesus Christ to the saving of poor sinners!

We must never forget, as we contemplate what Jesus did for us, when He died in our place, when He took our sins upon Himself, when He was treated by God as guilty for our crimes, and punished so that we might go free!

He has saved His people from their sins! His comfort for us is infinite and indescribable by us!

Let us worship Him, and praise Him for the wonderful comfort He has wrought for us, by dying to save us.