

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*The Danger of Self-Righteousness.*"

Please stand with me for the reading of God's Word...

**Isaiah 1:1** The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. **2** Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. **3** The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." **4** Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged. **5a** Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel?

Now this is the part for this morning...

**Isaiah 1:5b** The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. **6** From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds; they are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil.

You may be seated. Let's pray.

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse, but this morning we are going to continue from last Sunday's sermon. If I would've preached two hours last week this would've been the second half.

So let me briefly remind you what we talked about...

**Luke 5:31** Jesus [said], "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

We talked about just how fitting it is to describe Jesus as a **Physician** for sinners.

- Earthly physicians heal physical sickness, but Jesus heals spiritual sickness.
- Earthly physicians work on the body, but Jesus works on the soul.

Look back at Isaiah 1:1...

**Isaiah 1:1** The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Isaiah is speaking to Judah in the days of these kings. If you're familiar with the Jews during this season of their history, you know they were struggling spiritually.

Look what Isaiah said to them in **verse 5** about their sickness...

**Isaiah 1:5a** Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick,

They are sick in the head.

**Isaiah 1:5b** and the whole heart faint.

They have heart failure.

**Isaiah 1:6a** From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it,

They are sick from head to toe.

**Isaiah 1:6b but bruises and sores and raw wounds;**

They have running sores

**Isaiah 1:6c they are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil.**

They aren't receiving medical attention.

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They're pretty sick, aren't they?

But here's the question...

Are they sick physically or spiritually?

They're sick spiritually. Many of these people were healthy physically.

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Listen to what Jeremiah said to the Jews not many years later...

**Jeremiah 30:12 “For thus says the Lord: Your HURT IS INCURABLE, AND YOUR WOUND IS GRIEVOUS. 13 There is none to uphold your cause, NO MEDICINE FOR YOUR WOUND, NO HEALING FOR YOU.**

Again, they are sick, but it is spiritual versus physical.

There's good theology in these verses regarding our sinful nature and the **incurable** nature of it...

Despite what psychology or self-help experts might say, we can't cure ourselves. There is no human remedy or medicine. We can't heal our spiritual sickness by being good enough or trying hard enough.

Because they had forsaken the Lord – the only place they could find **healing** – their situation was **incurable**. There was no **medicine** or **healing** for them.

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Many of these people thought they were healthy when they were sick, which is dangerous...

If you're sick, but you think you're healthy:

- You don't know anything's wrong.
- You won't get the medical attention you need.
- You keep getting worse...often without knowing it.
- You won't go to the doctor. Nobody ever says, *“I'm going to go to the doctor today, because I feel so good.”*

We've all heard wonderful stories about people whose sicknesses were caught early and their chances for treatment and recovery were vastly increased.

We've also all heard sad stories about people who had a disease, thought they were healthy, so they didn't go to the doctor until much later. Then their chances for treatment and recovery were vastly decreased.

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It is really serious to be physically sick and not know it, but it's even worse to be spiritually sick and not know it:

- If you're physically sick and don't know it, the worst you can experience is physical death.
- But if you're spiritually sick and don't know it the worst you can experience is eternal death.

And this brings up an important question I'd like to ask...

What causes people to think they spiritually healthy when they are spiritually sick?

Self-righteousness!

And this brings us to Lesson One...

**Self-righteousness is dangerous because it (Lesson One) causes us to think we're healthy when we're sick.**

How many people have you ever met who recognized they were spiritually sick sinners who needed to be made well?

Instead, almost everyone you meet will say the same thing: "I'm a good person."

This is synonymous with, "I'm spiritually healthy."

Listen to these verses...

**Proverbs 16:2 All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit.**

This describes the way we view ourselves:

- Everything we do is right to us.
- We don't think we do anything wrong.
- When we do something wrong, we can justify it. We can find excuses.

This prevents us from recognizing our spiritual sickness.

**Proverbs 30:12 There are those who are clean in their own eyes but are not washed of their filth.**

This is interesting: filthy people who think they're clean. They look at themselves and see only cleanness, but God sees filth.

**Hosea 12:8 Ephraim has said, "Ah, but I am rich; I have found wealth for myself; in all my labors they cannot find in me iniquity or sin."**

Ephraim was another name for the northern kingdom of Israel, because it was the name of the largest tribe and sometimes the kingdom was named after the largest tribe...just like the southern kingdom of Judah was named after Judah, the largest tribe.

God sent the prophet Hosea to them at one of the spiritually lowest points in their history. They were about to be conquered by the Assyrians. They should have known they were sinners, but they said...

**They cannot find in me iniquity or sin.**

They were so spiritually sick God was about to wipe them out, but they thought they couldn't have been healthier.

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Laodicea was one of the worst churches in history. You might remember a few weeks ago we looked at the verse about the Lord saying he wanted to spit them out of his mouth.

Guess what they said about themselves?

**Revelation 3:17 For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.**

That IS a sick church that thought it was healthy.

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We need God's law to show us we are spiritually sick.

Despite what most of the world thinks, the purpose of the Ten Commandments, or God's Law, is not to show us how to be righteous or how to get to heaven. The purpose is to show us we're not righteous and we can't get to heaven on our own:

- **Romans 3:20** By works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since **THROUGH THE LAW COMES KNOWLEDGE OF SIN.**
- **Romans 5:20** The law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. This doesn't literally mean God gave the Law so we would sin more. God gave the Law so our sins would be more obvious. The Law would reveal our sins so clearly, we'd start saying, "Wow...I sin left and right,"; therefore, sin would seem to increase.
- **Romans 7:7** If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." Paul wouldn't have known he was a sinner without the law. <sup>i</sup>

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And there's one group who didn't know they were spiritually sick because they thought they kept the law perfectly...and that's the religious leaders.

Briefly turn to **Luke 16**. In **verses 1-13** Jesus taught the parable of the dishonest manager.

Look at **verse 14**...

**Luke 16:14** The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.

They knew Jesus was criticizing them, so they criticized him. Look how Jesus responded...

**Luke 16:15** And he said to them, "You are those who **JUSTIFY YOURSELVES BEFORE MEN**, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

What does justify mean?

I'm looking for a precise answer...two words in particular.

Declared righteous...and this brings us to Lesson two...

**Self-righteousness is dangerous, because it (Lesson Two) prevents us from wanting Jesus's righteousness.**

We are justified, or declared righteous, by grace through faith versus being justified, or declared righteous, by works. That means God declares us righteous by our belief in Christ versus the way we live...and thank God for that! If God had to justify us by our works he would declare us unrighteous.

But if you think you're righteous, you don't want Christ's righteousness.

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Notice Jesus said the religious leaders **justify themselves**, which means what?

They declare themselves righteous! They didn't think they were spiritually sick. They thought they were spiritually healthy.

But look what it says after that...

## **But God knows your hearts.**

They could declare themselves righteous all they wanted, but...

**Matthew 5:19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.**

There were lots of ugly things coming out of their hearts, so regardless of what they said about themselves God knew they were spiritually sick.

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Briefly turn to **Luke 18**. Verses 9 through 14 contain the well-known parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

**Luke 18:9 He also told this parable to some (referring to the religious leaders) who TRUSTED IN THEMSELVES THAT THEY WERE RIGHTEOUS, and treated others with contempt: 10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’**

This man definitely thought he was spiritually healthy!

In **verse 9** notice the words: **trusted in themselves that they were righteous.**

This looks to the whole problem with the religious leaders: they trusted in their own righteousness, versus the righteousness they could have from Christ by faith.

Look at **verse 13**...

**Luke 18:13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went down to HIS HOUSE JUSTIFIED, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

We see the sinner who looked the most unrighteous, justified, or declared righteous, while the Pharisee was not.

The religious leaders show us it’s possible to think highly of ourselves while looking terrible to God. In fact, the more highly we think of ourselves, the worse we look to God.

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In **verse 14** notice the words **went down to HIS HOUSE JUSTIFIED.**

When I first read this parable years ago it bothered me that it said **justified** versus forgiven, because I didn’t know justification included forgiveness and righteousness. Justification is greater than mere forgiveness.

John Piper said, *“Justification goes beyond forgiveness. Not only are we forgiven...but God also declares us righteous because of Christ...Christ bears our punishment, and Christ performs our righteousness. And when we receive Christ, all of His punishment and all of His righteousness is counted as ours.”*

Jerry Bridges said, *“To be justified means more than to be declared ‘not guilty.’ It actually means to be declared righteous before God. It means God has imputed or charged the guilt of our sin to His Son, Jesus Christ, and has imputed or credited Christ’s righteousness to us.”*

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Jesus offers two things: forgiveness and righteousness.

We receive both at conversion: it's known as double-imputation:

- Our sins are imputed to Christ's account. We are completely forgiven.
- His righteousness is imputed to our account. We are perfectly righteous.

It's the most unfair, but also the most beautiful transaction in history.

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Let me briefly explain one of the more confusing accounts in the Gospels: Jesus being baptized by John. Apparently, it was confusing to John too! Listen to what happened...

**Matthew 3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"**

John didn't understand why Jesus wanted to be baptized by him. He thought it should be the other way around.

Listen to how Jesus responded...

**Matthew 3:15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us TO FULFILL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS." Then he consented.**

When we are justified, we are given the perfect righteousness of Christ Himself. But for Christ to give us that perfect righteousness He had to be perfectly righteous. That means he had to do all of the righteous things a perfectly righteous person would do...including being baptized by John. That's how he would fulfill all righteousness.

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Why do we need Christ's righteousness?

If Jesus forgave our sins, but didn't give us His righteousness, we'd be forgiven and innocent, but that isn't the same as righteous.

To be righteous, we to have do righteous things. The clearest example of this in Scripture is with Adam and Eve...

Adam and Eve were innocent when they were created – because they hadn't done anything wrong, but they weren't righteous – because they also hadn't done anything right...or good.

Sometimes people mistakenly say Adam and Eve were perfect when they were created, but they weren't. To be perfect they'd have to be innocent AND righteous...or they'd have to be justified.

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Briefly take your mind back to last Sunday's sermon. Jesus said...

**Luke 5:31 "Those who are well (or think they're righteous) have no need of a physician, but those who are sick (recognize their spiritual sickness). 32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."**

Jesus said this, because if you don't think you're a sinner you don't want the two things Jesus offers.

1. First, you don't want forgiveness, because you don't think you need to be forgiven.
2. Second, you don't want His righteousness, because you already think you're righteous.

But people who recognize they are sinners hear Jesus's words and say, "I need to repent, so I can have His forgiveness and righteousness."

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This is why Jesus spoke the way He did in the Beatitudes...

**Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit** – or blessed are they who recognize their spiritual poverty – **for theirs is the kingdom of God.**

They will receive the Kingdom of God because they recognize they're spiritually poor, so they're looking for a righteousness outside themselves.

**Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled.**

They hunger and thirst for righteous because they know they don't have it.

**Isaiah 55:1 Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters** (this isn't talking about physical thirst or physical water; it's talking about spiritual thirst and spiritual, living water) **and he who has no money** (this isn't talking about physical money; this is the spiritual poverty from the beatitudes), **come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk** (now listen to this...) **WITHOUT MONEY AND WITHOUT PRICE.**

It's FREE!

How can **food, wine, and milk** be free?

Because it isn't talking about anything physical. These are metaphors for salvation, which is a free gift for people who truly want it!

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Let me illustrate what I think of when people don't want Christ's righteousness, because they try to be righteous enough themselves to go to heaven.

The Winter Olympics concluded a few days ago on February 20<sup>th</sup>. I confess that I didn't watch any of it because they don't have any cool sports. The Summer Olympics have track & field, gymnastics, weightlifting and God's favorite sport...any guesses?

Wrestling.

But the Winter Olympics have sports – and I'm using that word loosely – that I don't think should be called sports.

For example...

There is curling...and I'm not talking about the weightlifting exercise...which would be more of a sport.

Curling is basically just shuffleboard on ice.

I doubt whether Rhea will remember this, but one time when she was a child she saw curling and she said, *"I know what they are doing. They are cleaning the floor."*

I think many of the mothers in here would say cleaning a floor is more of a sport than curling.

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Luge, bobsled, and skeleton are also considered Winter Olympics "Sports." If we are honest, these are basically just sledding. How can sledding be an Olympic sport?

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You might be wondering why I am sharing this with you, and there are two reasons:

1. First, I want to vent about this.
2. Second, I want to share a story with you from the Winter Olympics...

Matthew Emmons is an American sharpshooter, and he was considered the best in the world. To give you an idea how great he was, in the Olympics, he had so seriously dominated his competition that on his last shot he had a 3-point lead on the man in second, and only needed a 7.2 to win gold.

To put this in perspective:

- The lowest score in the entire competition up to that point had been a 7.8.
- His lowest score on his first 9 shots was a 9.3...more than 2 points higher than the score he needed for gold.

He had already won the gold in the prone position, and with this gold he would've won a historic gold in the 3-positions competition (standing, kneeling, laying) and the prone.

Only one shot away, he took careful aim, fired, and made another bull's-eye.

But there was one problem...

He was in lane two...but he fired at the target in lane three.

He was awarded a score of zero. He went from 1st place to 8th place, which was last.

Michael Anti was Emmons' teammate who received the silver and he said, *"I feel awful for Emmons. It must be devastating for him. He was by far the best shooter in the competition and in 25 years of shooting he's the best I've ever seen anywhere in the world."*

This brings us to our last lesson...

**Self-righteousness is dangerous, because it (Lesson Three) is shooting at the wrong target.**

It doesn't matter:

- how good your aim is...
- how hard you try...
- how sincere you are...

It doesn't even matter if you get a bulls-eye...if you're shooting at the wrong target.

And self-righteous people who believe they're getting to heaven by being good enough – or people like Jesus described in **Luke 18:9 [who] trust in themselves that they are righteous** – are shooting at the wrong target.

**Romans 10:3 They being ignorant of God's righteousness, and SEEKING TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.**

What is the opposite of submission?

Rebellion!

People seeking to establish their own righteousness are rebelling against the way God has said we can be righteous, which is by faith in Christ.

We have talked about why people might not go to an earthly Physician: they don't know they are sick.

But there is one another reason people might not go...

They don't want to do with the doctor prescribes. They know the doctor will tell them to:

- Get more sleep

- Get more exercise
- Stop drinking alcohol
- Stop smoking
- Make changes to their diet
- Lose weight

But they don't want to do these things, so they don't go.

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And I think it's the same with Jesus, the Great Physician: He said, "**I have come to call sinners to repentance,**" but there are people who don't want to do what He prescribes and repent...so they don't go to Him.

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If you want to be spiritually healed by the Great Physician, this is what you must do: repent.

John MacArthur said, "*Sin is called sickness and habitual sin is called addiction or compulsive behavior. People think it requires medical care, but what is required is repentance.*"

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If you don't want to repent, then don't bother coming to Jesus:

- Imagine people with diabetes go to the doctor, but they won't make any changes to their diets.
- Imagine people with lung cancer, but they won't stop smoking.

They might as well not go to the doctor at all.

And people who don't want to repent, might as well not go to Jesus at all.

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Let me close with this verse about spiritual sickness that makes me thankful for Christ...

**Jeremiah 10:19 Woe is me because of my hurt! My wound is grievous. But I said, "Truly this is an affliction, and I must bear it."**

This man lamented his spiritual condition and inability to do anything about it.

But this doesn't have to be the case for us...

Yes, we are spiritually sick: **we are hurt, our wound is grievous, truly this is an affliction.**

But we don't have to bear it. We have a Physician who wants to make us well.

Thank God we have a Savior who came for the sick!

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I will be up front after service, and if you have any questions about anything I've shared, or I can pray for you in any way I would consider it a privilege to speak with you.

Let's pray.

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<sup>i</sup> It's like this: you only need...

- A parachute when you know the plane is crashing.
- You only need a cure if you know you have a disease.
- You only need to call the police when there's a crime.
- You only need to call the fire department when there's a fire.

Now it's God's Law that tells you...

- Your plane is crashing.
- You've got a terminal disease.

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- A terrible crime has been committed.
  - You're about to enter a terrible fire.