

He Carried Our Diseases

<i>Text</i>	Matthew 8:14-17
<i>Readings</i>	Matthew 8:1-17, Isaiah 53
<i>Theme</i>	Jesus' authority to heal our bodies testifies to his authority to heal our souls.
<i>Purpose</i>	To explain how the healing ministry of Jesus points His authority to heal us spiritually.

Congregation,

All of us have times of sickness and ill health. You might have a case of the common cold, or of a bad flu, or you may pick up a virus that makes you feel washed out and weak and miserable. You might have an accident that causes you a bad break or cut or sprain. Usually these things last a short time and then pass.

But there are others who suffer from more long-term conditions, who have to deal with chronic pain, maybe from a back injury, or from constant migraines or from some recurring illness. Some of you struggle with these things.

Whenever we are sick or in pain we long to feel better. We want to be healthy and well. We hope for a cure and for a rapid recovery. We want to be back to normal and to be able to get up and about once again. And sometimes we do get well again, but there are other times when we linger on with pain and suffering.

How should we see this? Why do some people get well again and others remain ill? Why doesn't Jesus heal everyone? Why doesn't he work more miracles like those he worked here?

We can't answer all these questions this morning, or indeed at any time, because doesn't give us all these answers.

But we can say something about these matters from this passage, about the physical and spiritual healing Jesus came to bring and how the one points to the other. The miracles of Jesus over sickness testified to his authority to heal our spiritual disease. This is the theme we want to explore.

In this passage we read, first of all, about **a special instance of physical healing**.

Jesus conducted most of his ministry in the region of Galilee in the north of Palestine. He spent quite a bit of time around the Sea of Galilee and the little villages on the shore of the lake, especially the town of Capernaum.

Peter and his brother Andrew came from the town on Bethsaida, about six kilometres away from Capernaum. It seems as though Peter had shifted to Capernaum because that is where Jesus had based his ministry after leaving Nazareth (Matthew 4:13) and Peter wanted to be closer to him.

Peter was married and his wife's mother lived with him in their little house. She had a fever. This may well have been caused by malaria which was common in those parts. Jesus came to Peter's house, as he often did and found this older woman very ill.

We read that Jesus "touched her hand and the fever left her". The additional laws of the Jewish scribes forbade touching persons who had a fever but Jesus was not bound by these man-made traditions. He knew the importance of touching someone.

Touching someone who is ill or distressed is a way to communicate affection and warmth and compassion. Jesus could have healed this woman with merely a word or with a brief command, but he also touched her to show his compassion.

"...and the fever left her." Just like that! "...and she got up and began to wait on them." Matthew mentions this to show that her recovery was complete; she recovered immediately and fully. She was back to normal and straight away went back to what she was used to doing - serving the Lord.

She did not ask to be healed; this is the only healing recorded in the gospel of Matthew where Jesus took the initiative without being asked. Usually Jesus is responding to a request. He did not do miracles just for their own sake - they always had a purpose.

This miracle isn't recorded because it was so spectacular or because it was more remarkable than others. There were no big crowds, no large gatherings - just a few people in a simple one room dwelling.

It is recorded because it was close to home. It affected the immediate family of Peter, one of the disciples close to Jesus.

Events make more of an impression on us when they affect someone in our family or the church. You might read about someone going in for serious surgery and you are concerned but all the more so when it's your daughter. Someone is gravely injured in an accident and you are distressed for them, but all the more so when it is a close friend of yours.

In this case the healing was close to home and it made all the more impression on Peter and his wife and on the other disciples - so Matthew records it for us.

But lest we think that the three miracles recorded in the first half of this chapter were isolated examples Matthew goes on to tell us that Jesus healed many people in that town. "When evening came many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick" (verse 16).

Here Matthew describes **general physical healing**.

This happened **in the evening**. We know from the other gospels that it was the Sabbath.

The Lord had commanded people to labour for six days and to rest on the seventh - no one was to do any work. But in their fanatical zeal for the law the scribes had added a whole raft of rules to this simple command. They defined a whole range of categories of work. One of these was carrying a burden. A burden was defined as anything weighing more than two figs.

This meant that carrying a sick person on the Sabbath was regarded as work. Healing a sick person was also regarded as work. This is why the people of the town waited until evening before bringing to Jesus those who were ill.

The Sabbath ended at sunset, but the scribes also defined that more precisely: The Sabbath ended when you could see two stars in the sky. Now throughout that day the people of Capernaum had heard about the healing of Peter's mother in law. This is why they brought their sick to him so he could also heal them.

Here again we see the compassion of Jesus. It was *evening*. We know from the other gospels that Jesus had healed three people already that day. He had dealt with opposition from the religious leaders. No doubt he had preached and taught. By evening he was ready to sit and rest and take it quietly. He was a man, human like us, and he suffered from tiredness and emotional exhaustion just like us. But all these people came and he healed them too.

Matthew then tells us: "This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases'" (verse 17).

This is a gospel for the Jews. Matthew often quotes the Old Testament because he wants the Jews to see that Jesus is the Messiah God had promised.

This quote comes from Isaiah 53:4, that famous chapter about the Suffering Servant. Matthew quotes it to show that Jesus' authority to heal our bodies testifies to his authority to heal our souls.

His *physical* healings point to his power to **heal people spiritually**.

Not everyone interprets this verse in this way. Some read it as a promise that Jesus will heal every physical ailment and disease we have.

So we need to look at this. How are physical and spiritual healing related together? What exactly does Matthew mean by this quote?

We need to say, first of all that **all sickness is connected with sin as the general cause**.

Sickness and death came into this world as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve. They had disobeyed God by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God had warned Adam; "On the day you eat of it you will die."

The Apostle Paul explains that “sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).

If there was no sin there would be no sickness.

If Adam and Eve had been perfectly obedient the world would have remained a perfect place. But they didn’t and evil and suffering entered this world.

Secondly we note that **Jesus came to cure people of sickness.**

He did this many times in his ministry. He had compassion on people and wanted to heal them. He cast our demons, made the blind see, caused the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, the paralysed to move; he even brought life to those who were dead!

But Jesus did not heal *everyone* in Palestine at that time. He healed many, but probably only a very small proportion of those who were ill. Only a very small percentage of the population was cured. Some didn’t hear about Jesus; others heard about him but couldn’t get to meet him; and others heard about him but didn’t believe in him.

Some Christians believe that Jesus wants to heal everyone and wants everyone to be cured of whatever is troubling them. But that’s not what the Bible teaches. Jesus did not heal everyone. Nor did the Apostles. Paul himself suffered from a physical ailment throughout his life; Timothy was often unwell; Paul left Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Tim 4:20) and another of Paul’s friends, Epaphroditus, was very ill and almost died. It is not God’s will to cure every believer who is sick. Sometimes God allows us to remain ill for some purpose, which we may or may not discover.

Yet we can confidently state that Jesus came to cure people of sickness. He continues to heal people today, occasionally through a miracle, more often through natural means. Now he may not always do that in this life, but he certainly will in the life to come. In heaven there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for then the old order of things will have passed away (Rev 21:4).

The healing ministry of Jesus looks back to the beauty of the Garden of Eden and forward to the perfection of heaven where there will be the tree of life whose leaves will be for the healing of the nations.

So we have seen that all sickness can be traced back to sin as the general cause and that Jesus came to heal believers of physical diseases, if not in this life, then certainly in the next.

Thirdly we note that **the physical healings Jesus did testified to his authority to heal us spiritually.** The physical points to the spiritual.

This is the point of the quote from Isaiah 53:4 –

“He took up our infirmities
and carried our sorrows.”

This teaches us that Jesus was human like us and that he suffered as we do. He identified with us in our sickness and struggle.

It also teaches us that Jesus has a great compassion for those who are suffering. We have seen examples of this already in his attitude to the leper and this woman he healed. He pitied people in their pain.

But it teaches us much more than this. By quoting this one verse out of Isaiah 53 Matthew has in mind the entire chapter. He was thinking of the whole context of this verse and all that it said about the Messiah. Isaiah and Matthew had in mind much more than Jesus power to heal physically - they knew that whatever he did to people's bodies was a sign of what he could do for their souls.

The very next verse of Isaiah 53 goes on to say:

"he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him
and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

Jesus did not come only to deal with our physical pain - he came to deal with the root of all evil, with the sin in our lives. He came to take the punishment for sin on himself and to pay the penalty for sin.

There is a fictional story of a man standing on the banks of dirty filthy river. As he stood there he saw person floating in the water in great trouble, on the verge of drowning. He felt sorry for the man and dived in to rescue him. He took hold of him and managed to get him to the bank and dragged him up. He was just recovering from this effort when he saw another man drowning in the grimy water, so he dived in to rescue him too. This happened again and again and the rescuer was nearing exhaustion.

Then he saw another man striding past him up along the bank of the river. He called out to him; "Stay here and help me; these people are drowning!" But the man replied; "I can't stay; I'm going up the river to deal with the man who is throwing these people in."

This is what Jesus has done. We are to rescue people who are drowning in the river; but Jesus came to defeat Satan, to conquer evil and to deal thoroughly with sin. Through his death on the cross he dealt with the essence and the core of sin. The Apostle Paul describes this in Colossians 2:13b-15...

We remember this regularly in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We also remember this every Easter as we recall the death of Jesus on the cross.

We remember that he came to forgive us our sins, to free us from guilt and to break the grip Satan and sin have on us.

This is why Paul can write those triumphant words: "There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!" (Romans 8:1).

This doesn't completely remove sin from our lives or the lives of others; we still struggle against our old sinful nature. Just as we suffer the effects of sin in our bodies so we suffer the consequences of sin in our minds and hearts and lives. We continue to struggle with doubt and temptation and sin and guilt.

But remember that Jesus "carried our diseases": If you believe in Jesus you can be assured that your sins are forgiven and that you are forever right with God.

And you can look forward to the day when there will be no more sickness and no more sin - the day when all things will be made new.

Amen.