

Hospital For Sinners
July 1, 2018

Who here has never been sick? Who has been sick longer than a week? Who has been sick longer than 2 weeks? Who has been sick longer than a month? Who is sick chronically with the same condition?

There are different kinds of sickness. Likely you were thinking my question was about physical sickness. Physical sickness is something we all have to deal with from time to time.

Other kinds of illness are emotional or psychological. Any of these three kinds of illness can leave us feeling helpless. Because, for a time they take control of our lives. They prevent us from doing what we want or need to do.

Another kind of illness is spiritual illness. Jesus speaks of this in Mark, chapter two.

Mark 2:14-17 (NIV) As he (Jesus) walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

The sickness Jesus is speaking of in verse 17 is not physical sickness. It is not mental or emotional sickness. Jesus is speaking of spiritual sickness. Specifically,

Jesus is speaking of sin as an illness.

Jesus speaks of two kinds of people, righteous people and sinful people. The word righteous means having a right relationship with someone. In this context it means having a right relationship with God. We like to speak of degrees of righteousness. No one is perfectly righteous. But we fudge the truth. If we are mostly righteous, we may just say, "Yeah, I'm a righteous person."

Anyone who considers himself to be a righteous person believes he does not have a sin problem. Even if there is some sin in him, he considers it so small as to be of no account. That is why he dares to think of himself as righteous.

If he admits to any sin, he does not consider it bad enough to affect his relationship with God. So if the choices in personal labeling are between righteous and sinner, he chooses righteous.

Part of the reason he chooses to think of himself as righteous is that he is comparing himself to other people, people who clearly have a sin problem. Many of the Pharisees

in first century Israel considered themselves to be so good, that their little sin was not a problem, not like those they labeled to be sinners.

Most societies classify some people as good and some as bad. In our own culture almost everyone has been labeled as bad at some time by someone. Perhaps you have labeled as bad such groups as bikers, hippies, hobos, whites, blacks, Mexicans, Jews, Catholics, Muslims, Christians, high school dropouts, beggars, the homeless, the rich, the poor, lawyers, or used car salesmen.

It is easy to lump people together by some common characteristic and then label them all as bad. We should not do so, but it is a common sin.

Well, in the first century Israel, Jewish society had views about who was good and who was bad also. The Pharisees were considered to be the best people in terms of personal goodness. They tried harder than anyone to obey the commands of God. They were not perfect, but they had the least sin, at least of outward sins. You might say they were considered the healthiest of the people when it came to sin. They certainly did not need healing.

Four categories of sinners in Israel:

Jewish society had divided the sinners into four different groups.

- **Physically sick or handicapped.** It was the common belief that sickness or being handicapped was God's punishment upon sinners. Jesus declared this to be false, but it was commonly believed by most people.

- **Those who were not trying to obey God**

They did not usually observe the Sabbath, tithe their crops, or diligently observe the many laws and traditions that the Pharisees taught. They were not very religious.

There are lots of people like this today. You may be related to some. They claim a belief in God, but they do not seek to know and live God's will. They may be good citizens and good neighbors, but they are not very religious.

- **The criminals and prostitutes**

These people were not good, and knew they were not good. They made no pretense to being good. These knew they were sick with sin. Some may have wished things to be different, but if so, they figured there was no hope for them. The Pharisees and priests were not going to help them. Until Jesus came, there was no one to help them heal of their sin and be accepted by God.

- **Those who collected taxes for the Roman government**

Remember as you read the new testament, that Israel was an occupied country. It had been taken over by the Romans. The Romans would hire Jews to collect taxes from other Jews. The Jews who did this were considered to be traitors to Israel and the worst of sinners.

Levi is a tax collector. Yet, Jesus offers him a cure out of his life of sin. Jesus invites Levi to become one of his disciples. Levi accepts the invitation and invites Jesus to his house for a dinner party.

Now who do you think Levi invites to his party? He does not invite the Pharisees. He knows they would not come. They didn't even speak to him on the street. There was no use inviting them. Instead, like we do, he invites his friends.

Now who would be the friend of the worst sinner in the community, a tax collector? The only friends Levi had were other tax collectors. So the guests at the party, except for Jesus and His other disciples, were considered by Jewish society as the worst sinners in the community.

The Pharisees take notice of Jesus dining at Levi's house. Eating a meal with someone was a sign of acceptance. So they ask the obvious question of Jesus' disciples.

Mark 2:16 (NIV) "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

I have no doubt that some of Jesus' disciples were also puzzled about that as well. It was often the case that his disciples did not understand the things Jesus did. I'm sure the disciples said to each other, "How could he ask us to come in here with THESE people?"

Jesus, aware of the feelings and prejudices and questions of those present answers the question on everyone's mind.

Mark 2:17 (NIV) "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Now let me ask you a question. **How do you picture the church today?** We often use picture words to help us understand things like groups. The church is a group of people. But what is its purpose? What picture word helps you in your understanding of the church's life and purpose?

Do you picture the church as an army, doing battle with the forces of evil in the world? Do you see the church as a newspaper, taking the good news to the world? Do you see it as a school, teaching people what the Bible says? There are any number of such picture words you might use to focus on a particular aspect of the church. Let me suggest one such picture word today.

I suggest that we picture the church as a hospital for sinners.

Using this picture word will change how we see ourselves and each other. It will change how we see those outside of the church. It will change how we see the words and actions of Jesus. I suggest that we look at the world with this statement of Jesus in mind and view the church as a hospital for sinners.

Jesus is calling to sinners, "If you are sick with sin, come, I have the cure that you need." All of us who are Christians at one time answered Jesus' call to follow Him, and he is dealing with our sin sickness. Jesus is healing us from sin-sickness in three ways.

Upon our initial faith Jesus healed us from the penalty of our sins.

We have been declared to have a right relationship with God. This righteousness is a gift, not one we earned. This is Christ's righteousness. We are still sin-sick. But the

penalty of our sin has been paid. God has clothed us with the righteousness of Jesus. Jesus has healed us from the penalty for our sins.

We have joined His church and are learning to think and act like people who are being healed of the power of sin.

Currently, Jesus is healing us of the power of sin.

He has placed His Holy Spirit in us to heal us from the power of sin on the inside. It is sin in our hearts that leads to sinful behavior. The picture of a hospital for sinners keeps us focused on the continuing healing work that God is doing in us. And then there is the future work.

In the future, Jesus will heal us from the presence of sin.

As a hospital for sinners, we must guard against the temptation to think of ourselves as anything but sinners.

There is the danger of thinking we are completely well.

As we repent of sin and become better people inside and out, we may forget that we are still sin-sick. No matter how good we get, we will always struggle against sin in us as long as we are in these bodies. Only when we get our resurrection bodies will we be healed of the presence of sin.

Until then we often fall back into sinful ways. We allow sinful thoughts and desires and prejudices to dwell in our hearts. We may even adapt to our illness and just consider some sin to be un-healable.

We should become less sinful, but we will always be liable to sin. We must not think of ourselves as being well.

Alcoholics are not well, even when they quit drinking. They are instead in a process of recovery. We call them recovering alcoholics. We never call them recovered alcoholics, as if they are fully healed. They are still alcoholics. And one drink can reignite their illness.

As Christians we are addicted to sin, but are recovering. We are recovering sinners. We will never be completely well until Jesus rescues us from these bodies of death. Any giving in to sin leads us back into further sin. The power of sin is strong and must be resisted every day, many times a day.

Let us never think of ourselves as well, but always sinners working for the healing of other sinners.

The harm of thinking ourselves well:

- Well people don't want to be around the sick.

When we are healthy, we don't want to be around sick people. Have you ever gone to the theater or been standing in a line at the store and the person behind you starts coughing? You think to yourself, "Don't cough on me. I don't want to get sick."

So if Christians start thinking they are well, they may think, "We don't want those sinners in our church." Remembering that we are a hospital for sinners means we welcome sinners who want to get well, no matter who they are or what they have done.

If we think, of ourselves as well, then we will mistreat other sinners when they come to our church. We will act like the Pharisees did. When Christians start thinking of themselves as well, they may turn the church into a fort to keep sinners out. This is not what Jesus wants us to do.

- Well people are often surprised by sin in their church.

No one in a hospital is surprised to find a sick person in the hospital. No one in a hospital is surprised if a doctor gets sick while working with sick people. Why is it then that we are surprised when someone in the church sins against us? Maybe they say or do something that offends us, whether intentional or not. We should not be surprised because all of the people in the church are themselves sin sick people not yet cured of all of their sin.

As a church let us embrace the concept of being a hospital for sinners. You and I know that every sinner is in need of healing, even those who don't think they do need it. Just because someone doesn't think they need a doctor, doesn't mean they are not sick.

Can you admit today that you are a sinner in need of Jesus' healing?

Admit your sin to God through prayer. Choose to receive Jesus as your Savior and turn your life over to him as Lord, and he will begin the healing process of your soul.