



Presenting Christ-Part 5
Jesus as Deliverer
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One of the most familiar stories told by Christ was the story of what I like to call the compassionate Samaritan. Remember that one? Here was this man who had every reason not to stop and help this crime victim on the road to Jericho, and according to the story, only one reason to stop and help—namely, his compassion. And in doing so he becomes the unlikely hero of this story, one of the most familiar and popular stories of the last 2000 years.

The parable of the Good Samaritan, as we now call it, is a story that Christ used to instruct his disciples that when there was a need—an obvious need, someone was in need—you are supposed to do what it takes to stop and assist, to stop and help them even when there's no logical reason to do so; even when there are reasons not to do so; and even when it's at great personal cost to yourself. The parable was stated in context to be an instructive parable. But if you read that with the thought of who was telling this story, you start to see it being much more descriptive than instructive.

Is this not a picture of what Christ did for us—a person who had every reason not to come to earth and help us? There's no logical compulsion for him to be here to save, especially when it was at great personal cost to himself. It was so illogical, the Bible says in Romans chapter 5, that he was doing it for people that were his enemies. It's an amazing thought and really illustrates the central component of the gospel. And the problem is, if we don't understand that aspect of it, we will not understand a lot about what the Christian life is supposed to be all about.

Much of the Christian life is to be characterized by the kind of reflection and thanksgiving and joy that comes from recognizing how much God loves us—how amazing it is that though we didn't deserve it, Christ would die for us. If we don't understand that kind of compassion, we won't understand the real core doctrine of the Bible, namely that of grace—that for no good in us, Christ would give his all to pay your sin and mine, that we might benefit while he in that act, in that transaction, would suffer.

Very important for us and critical for us to get: if you read through the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—you start to get that picture of Christ giving his all. You see it in his life, you see it in the Passion Week, in the trial, in the crucifixion—all of that. You start to say, "Wow, that's an amazing composite picture of grace." But sometimes, as we study the details of the Gospel, you start to see that paradigm kind of embedded in a microcosm in the narratives that we study. In other words, you start to see that the Christ who gave everything out of great compassion for the good of the people that he loved—you start to see that played out in some lesser contexts.



The passage that we've reached today in Luke chapter 4 comes on the heels of his ministry in the synagogue in Capernaum, which we said last week was a bit of a hard pill to swallow because the emphasis was on the authority of Christ and on the fact that with a word, he can bring people into judgment—and rightfully so. The just God can respond with a word to judge those who sin and disregard his standards. And yet, I begged you to come back this week—so thanks for coming back—and I said we need to balance this picture of Christ as Judge with the picture of Christ as Deliverer.

So take your Bibles, if you haven't already, and turn to Luke chapter 4 as we take a look at Jesus leaving the synagogue in Capernaum, which would become his new base of operations. Having left Nazareth some 20 miles away, it was a Sabbath day, a Saturday. He had taught in the morning there and everyone marveled at his authority, not only in his didactic or teaching ministry, but in the way he commanded those that were oppressed by this interesting first-century phenomenon—the kind of activity of demons possessing people's lives, or as we would put it, as we said last week, the kind of passive pity caused by these evil spirits. And a little bit more on that tonight, and much more as we work through the book of Luke.

Take a look at this text in verse number 38. Remember the teaching took place in the synagogue, sitting in what they called the seat of Moses. This is Luke 4:38: "He arose from that seat, and he left the synagogue, and he entered Simon's house"—better known as Peter; he would have that name later given to him by Christ. "Now Simon's mother-in-law"—by the way, that makes it very clear that he is—Protestants, what?—married. Interesting. "She was ill with a high fever." Dr. Luke is the only one who clarifies that this is a high fever. He's concerned with a lot of medical details throughout this book, as we'll find out. "And they appealed to him." They—by the way, if you read over in Mark 1, the parallel passage, we learn that Andrew was there as well, and Andrew was Peter's brother, and they're both concerned for their mom who was sick—mother-in-law, that is—and she had this high fever and they said to Christ, you know, what can you do here?

"And he"—that is Christ, verse 39—"stood over her and rebuked the fever"—that's an interesting way to put it—"and it left her. And immediately she rose and began to serve them."

Now, as we learned in verse 37, after that scene in the morning at the synagogue, "the report about him went into every place in the surrounding region." We assume this is the same day now, when the sun is setting. And if you've ever been to the Middle East—or Israel in particular, Jerusalem—on the Sabbath day, when we take our trips over there (many of you—hundreds of you—have gone with me over there to Israel), things are shut down during the day, but at sunset on the Sabbath, everything opens up. And so everyone, now free to move about and go about business at sundown on the Sabbath, they start bringing those—it says in verse 40—all those who were sick with various diseases were brought to him. "And he laid his hands on every one of them, and he healed them."



Last week we saw the phenomenon of demonization. Verse 41, we see more of that: “And demons also came out of many, crying out, ‘You are the Son of God.’ But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak”—we saw that last time as well; noted that a few weeks back as to why; we’ll touch on that again tonight—“because they knew that he was the Christ,” the Messiah, the one coming from the Old Testament.

That’s a bit of a severe phenomenon. We’re going to look at that and think that through in verse 41, but the rest of this is about healing—the healing of a high fever of Peter’s mother-in-law (Andrew’s mother-in-law), the healing of several others in verse 40 who were brought to him with various diseases, all kinds of problems, and Jesus putting his hands on them and healing them.

But that focus—we could spend time talking about that, and we’ll have to when we need to, and I suppose it’s important—but what we need to see here in this act of great compassion is the big picture: that Christ came to save people. And according to the first verse you ever learned, there was an emotional—if you will, if not disposition or motive—for all of this. What’s the first verse you ever learned? John 3:16. And what did it say? “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son.” See, this idea of the motivation of saving lost people who are going to incur the penalty of their own behavior is motivated, the Bible says, by love.

To be more specific, and to be more emotional about it, “the word *spell* lengthen,” which we’ve talked about in the past—that Greek word that really represents kind of that visceral gut reaction and concern for people that Jesus had as he looked at the metropolitan city of Jerusalem on a hillside having lunch with his disciples—and he was moved with compassion over the people, because they were lost. They were like sheep without a shepherd. They didn’t respond rightly to the teaching of Christ, and they were going to incur penalty, judgment for their sin—ultimate judgment when they face their Maker. That was the ministry of Christ.

Now think about it. I quoted the passage: he didn’t come to be served; rather, he came to serve and to give his life a ransom. That was the highlight. That was the purpose. That’s the reason Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were all written. So when we see something like this, let’s understand tonight, for the sake of our discussion, this is a microcosm, a paradigm of the bigger picture that we’re going to celebrate tonight and think through tonight. And that is the fact that God so loved the world that he would send his Son to deliver us from our sin—the penalty of our sin.

If you’re taking notes, and I wish that you would (there’s a worksheet there for you), the first point I’d like us to underscore is the fact that we need to—this is a bit of a weak word for it, but let’s call it—**value Christ’s compassion**. We need to acknowledge it, we need to see it, we need to value it, and we even need to worship him for it, because without it, you and I are lost. Because according to the Bible, the whole human race careened into sin by its own decision. This is a mess that Adam



and Eve made, and when you and I came along, we compounded the problem with our own decision-making. And God could just as well be just and even kind and walk away from it all and not do anything about it, and we could incur before our Maker the just response to our sin, and God would still be God and he'd still be a good God.

But there's a kind of depth to the compassion of God that goes beyond anything we know, and I'd like to turn you to Romans 5, which I quoted briefly at the outset. But I think we need to read the context of that statement about "while we were still enemies Christ died for us" and take a look at really what an unusual kind of love this is. Because I think we often think that we understand something of the compassion of Christ because we've felt compassion for people, but the kind of value we should place on Christ's compassion is something entirely different.

Romans chapter 5—let's take a look at verse 6 and we'll read through verse 11. Romans 5:6: "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." We're going to get to the word "enemies" here in a minute, but here are two words that describe the object of the compassion of Christ. See, I'm used to loving the lovable; I'm used to being compassionate for those that are innocent. That's how I have compassion, and I can even understand the Good Samaritan story—there's a victim of crime; I have natural compassion for that. But here we have a different situation: "the ungodly."

Then he creates an illustration that should be helpful for us: "For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would even dare to die." And if you know anything about the vocabulary in the New Testament that we've taught on many times, this word "good" is a word that goes up to the top of the vocabulary list. Sometimes we can talk about righteousness in a relative sense, but the word "good" in the New Testament is usually reserved for that highest spot. And so he says, I mean, if you really had a good person, maybe someone would dare to die. But here's our verse: "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

"Since therefore" (verse 9) "we now have been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God? For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, how much more—now that we are reconciled—shall we be saved by his life? More than that, we also rejoice in God"—and this is the goal of my sermon tonight—"through the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

If you've been a Christian for any amount of time at all, this may start to become old news to you, and I need to urge you not to let that happen—to get back to the place where you marvel at the extent of the love of God for you.



Richard Ramirez died yesterday. Did you read about that? The old Night Stalker—he was doing his work right here, wasn't in South Orange County. And nobody felt compassion for him yesterday. He died of liver disease at the Marin General Hospital just down from San Quentin. Most of us said, "We couldn't kill him? What took so long?" He was on death row for a lot of years, as you know. And Richard Ramirez, Night Stalker—he had proved, had he not, to be our enemy, killing 16 people, murdering them in cold blood. Certainly, you would say he's ungodly.

And let's just take the illustration we just found here in Romans chapter 5. It says that maybe we would die—give the ultimate price of our lives—for a righteous person; scarcely die for a righteous person, but maybe for a good person we'd dare to die. Let's think about the love you have for your kids. Most of us would say, "Hey, you know what? In a pinch, in a crisis, I'd give my life for my kids." But the arrangement in Romans 5 is you take someone who is an enemy. If you're not all big on Ramirez, I mean, add someone else—Wayne Gacy, or Ted Bundy—or pick another person that is at the bottom of your list in terms of being ungodly and unrighteous.

And from God's perspective—trust me, trust me—our lives, even though we feel pretty socially acceptable in our little relative view of righteousness, the distance between the holiness of God and our lives is much greater than the way that we as sinful people look at the Gacys and the Ramirezes of this life. And the Bible says that not only, as we think about the love and compassion we may have for our children, would we give our lives for the life of our child—the Bible says that God gave his Son for the life of his enemy.

You're going to give your son for Ramirez? He's dying of liver cancer in the hospital there at Marin General Hospital. You're going to say, "You know what? I want you to live. I'm willing to have my son die on an operating table to save your life—give you his good liver; put that in there; let's have you walk free." Anybody going to sign up for that? Not a chance.

See, the problem that we have is we elevate ourselves so often in thinking that we're pretty good people—that God must love us because, I don't know, we know we're not perfect, but, I mean, I have some redeeming value in me. There's some love that God has for me because I'm lovable. There's some compassion that God has for me because I'm innocent. The biblical picture is much different than that. If you know anything about the book of Romans—we're here reading in Romans chapter 5—he spent two and a half chapters trying to make it very clear that no matter how much you may feel superior to the next guy in society, the distance between a holy God and unrighteous people is infinite. We are not acceptable, nor are we loving to God, as we pointed out last week. But the amazing truth is that even while we were ungodly, weak, unrighteous, and enemies of God, he was willing to send his Son to suffer and die for you.



It's an amazing truth that we ought to value much more than we do: the love of God.

Now this passage obviously is about a sickness, and here's Andrew and Peter appealing to Christ to get their mom through a high fever—"Please, can you do something about this?" And he does: he has compassion, and he stands over her—these beds were on the ground in the early first-century culture—and so he goes up to her bedside and he heals her.

I'm thinking to myself: totally unnecessary. I mean, to make the parallel between the unnecessary act of redemption and the unnecessary act of getting over a fever, I'm thinking, "Why does she get out of it? What's her deal, right? Why is she exempt from that?" We all have to endure our fevers and our high fevers. I had a sickness this year—it was awful, it's terrible. You're sick, you get sick—what's the deal?

As a matter of fact, if you think about that just a little bit—and we don't have time to turn there, but jot it down if you're a note-taker—what we need to remember about the issues of life as we think of the microcosm of a physical sickness and the macrocosm of death and judgment: the Bible says all of it is deserved. All of it is a result—if not the immediate cause of our sin, it is the ultimate cause of our sickness. Jot down the passage, if you would: Genesis chapter 3. You remember in Genesis 3, when the sentence from God came upon Adam and Eve because of their sin? What the Bible says is that God gets very specific about cursing the fabric of society—nature itself. He says, "Cursed is the ground because of you," which, by the way, is what Adam and Eve are made from. We have about, what, eight dollars' worth of biological material in us—we're just made from the dirt. And the Bible says that the ground was cursed.

Now, the only two examples he gives are thorns and thistles will grow up, and that's going to make you trying to get a living off the ground going to make it really hard; you're going to have to earn your wages by the sweat of your brow. The earth is going to not just produce fruit now; it's going to produce a lot of things like thorns and thistles that are going to make it really hard for you. You'll have to work to weed out the bad stuff, because bad stuff will come from the fabric of planet Earth—of the whole universe, frankly—including your body. Then he says, to speak to the body without any specifics, "You're made of dust, and to dust you will return." You're going back; you're going to die. That was the promise: you disobey, you cast off the lordship of the God of the universe—you're going to pay a penalty for that. And the very fabric of the universe will be cursed because of you.

In other words, every time you get sick, every time there's a physical problem, and every time a person—and many of them will today—will die all around Southern California, every single one of those acts is nothing more, to put it real frankly, than God's outworking of his promise in Genesis chapter 3. It's all exactly what God promised would happen.



So when Peter and Andrew's mother-in-law is suffering from a high fever, that's exactly what God had promised would happen in Genesis chapter 3. Now, it's not much comfort to me when I got really sick this year to think, "Well, this is great—God is a faithful God keeping his promise right now." But in reality, that is exactly it. I've had several of my friends and relatives die—go to those funerals and tearfully say goodbye. That's nothing more than God keeping the promise of Genesis chapter 3.

See, here's the thing about Simon's mother-in-law: she would get well here on this Sabbath afternoon, but she'd get sick again. As a matter of fact, you'd know where she is today if she were still alive—but she's dead. She died. This was a temporary act of compassion that would have no lasting value in her life. She could suffer through a high fever like most of us have—if not this year, in the last few years, we've had some high fever and we've gotten over it. All it did was save her, I don't know, a week? I don't know—two weeks of fatigue and a week of real struggle and whatever went with that high fever.

You see, it's just really representative of Christ's heart more than any real final cure for this gal. As a matter of fact, the more you look at what you see in the Bible in terms of Christ coming and healing people, these were all very temporary fixes—even the most extreme examples of him bringing people back from the dead. There's not a single person Christ brought back from the dead that's still alive. They all physically died again.

If you think of it that way, we have nothing left in this passage to do but realize he didn't bring any permanent fix to this gal. Matter of fact, every healing we read about in the Bible—none of them were permanent. They were all temporary. But they displayed something of the heart of Christ: when he saw a need, when he saw suffering, when he saw hurt, when it appealed to him, occasionally he stepped forward, and in compassion he gave relief.

That's the picture I want us to recognize: it's just a snapshot, a microcosm—an example in a home, in a back bedroom, if you will, of Simon Peter's mother-in-law—of the thing we should be most concerned about, and we are concerned about here tonight. And that is that the act of compassion that motivated Christ's death is the thing that saves us from something that is permanent—something that will affect us a thousand years from now—and that is where we spend eternity.

And in that regard, it takes me back to the 1707 set of lyrics that Isaac Watts wrote, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." Remember that great old hymn? Here's the last line: "Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small; love"—that's the motivating factor, compassion we're calling it here—"so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

Here's a snippet here in verse 39 of him giving relief, and what does she do? She gets up immediately, and she begins to what? Serve. That's the reaction. Yeah—that's a microcosm. If Christ came in, in the midst of my sickness that I had this year—I'm making it sound super dramatic; I didn't feel like dying; you've been through those—those happen to me every seven or eight years. I get one and I just think, "We can just end it all now, God—I'm done with life." I had one of those this year. If Christ had showed up and relieved that, I would have been grateful. The natural response of someone who gets something that they don't deserve and is unnecessary, especially when, according to the Bible, being a participant in the human race makes me subject to all the sicknesses, decay, disease, cancer, and eventual death—for Christ to give me a reprieve, a gracious reprieve—certainly I'd say, "What can I do for you?"

Which, by the way, is a different kind of healing than a lot of people talk about today. It's a healing that's so immediate you don't need to get over it for a few hours—this is done. She gets all of her energy back; she stands up to serve. Which, just as a little sidebar, would be a good way for us to wrap up this first point of the message, and that is: what is our response to the love and compassion of Christ sending his Son to die for you? Where are you at in terms of service for him? Not a bad thought—we ought to go there. I mean, most of us love the fact that Christ died for us, but it doesn't affect us the way that it ought to, because it doesn't generate—as Isaac Watts put it—that kind of sense of the demand of that kind of love to say, "Whatever."

Even when Isaiah experienced a little bit of that, and he sensed the fact that he was a man of unclean lips, and there was that image of atonement for his sin, the first thing he said when it came to anything that God wanted is, "Here am I." What's the next line? "Send me." That is a picture of a kind of gratitude. If you want to calibrate or judge or measure how much you really understand and appreciate the compassion and love of God, take a look at your life of service for Christ. What are you doing for him? We see needs all the time—there are, not just within the church (I mean, they're clearly here as well), but there are clearly needs, and the question always becomes: what are we doing in response to that?

Psalm 103—we taught through that this last summer. What a great psalm that is—maybe for you to review in terms of a little homework assignment and thinking about the response to the greatness of God's compassion toward you—not just in saving you, as he puts it there in Psalm 103, redeeming your life from the pit, but also getting you through all your diseases and sicknesses, whatever those might be. That should lead to a life of service to Christ.

All right—Christ is compassionate. Fantastic. You're right: he loved us so much he sent his Son to die for us. But you've just made the point, Mike, that keeping Simon's mother-in-law from continuing for a week or two weeks in this illness really didn't do much for her in the long term; it



was simply a demonstration of his compassion. So, I don't know—it's not a lot of help in the long run, although I'm sure she's real grateful for it; she gets up and serves him.

Look at the next verse, verse 40. He does this not just to her, but to everyone else in this town— whoever came and brought the sick with various diseases, he'd lay his hands on them and he would heal them. It's an amazing statement, and it's one that shows us that Christ is a kind of Christ that is willing to display his compassion in a very generous, magnanimous, broad, liberal kind of way.

But why is he doing this? I mean, seriously—what is this all about? Go back up, if you would, to verse 17 in this passage. Go back to when he was in the Nazareth synagogue: he picked up the scroll, and the Bible says there he found the place (verse 17) where it was written. Now reading in verse 18, Luke 4:18: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." Now he's reading from Isaiah 61—you remember this message; we looked at this. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me"—that's the word that we get the word "Christ" from; he's made—I am the Messiah—"to proclaim the good news"—that's the word "gospel," right, *euangelion*—"to the poor. He sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are oppressed," and we looked at that paradigm that's set up there—the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed—"and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Now, some people, because of the juxtaposition of that kind of statement and what he's doing here in Capernaum, healing people of all kinds of diseases, they say, "Well, he's doing it." Yeah, but what did we say about this text? Is the coming of the Christ of the Old Testament really about trying to get poor people more money in their bank account, captives to get out of prison, blind people to actually see so they can see for 40, 50, 60 years of their lives, and oppressed people to not be oppressed? That's not the point. What did we say about this text? These are all—in Isaiah's language—images about the ultimate concern of God working through the Messiah to grant favor to people who don't deserve it.

And I'm not talking about the expressions of healing, financial success, good sight, and the ability not to be oppressed by people. As a matter of fact, there are plenty of people who love the Lord and have throughout the last 2000 years that have been poor, who have been put in prison, who have been blind, and have been oppressed for the entirety of their Christian life. And some people would say, "Well, that's their problem, because there's something lacking in their faith." I hope you're past that level of theology in your thinking. Are you really telling me that someone like Fanny Crosby, who's been blind her whole adult life, was lacking faith or had some defect in her relationship with God that caused her to be blind her whole life and she never got her healing from God?



“No, but you’re seeing it right here in verse 40—he’s healing people.” I get that. What is this all about? I’m glad you asked. Go to John chapter 5—we’re not far from it. This should go without saying if you have been around for very long. I guess even before we read this, I should clarify—maybe you haven’t been around very long. There are people that will stand up and pontificate from their television pulpits, often. They happen to be on television because they do really well financially with this message, and they tell you—because it costs a lot to be on TV (that’s the connection of that statement)—they’ll tell you that God wants you healed; everyone should have their healing; everyone should get healed. And they point to passages like Luke 4:40, and they say, “See there? Jesus went around doing it, and whoever they brought, he laid his hands on them and healed them.”

The Bible is very clear, first of all, if you read from beginning to end, that these kinds of supernatural expressions of the power of God didn’t happen very often. Quick rundown of the biblical examples of supernatural interventions of God into time and space—where he actually suspended the natural laws to where a fever, for instance, that’s making someone sick and putting them on their back with no energy—with one word can stand them up with complete health. That’s just one expression of the suspension of natural law—only 86 times from beginning to end of the Bible. Now, a lot of providential things that we’d say, “Look at God at work through the providence, working within the laws of nature.” Ten times we see it in the ministry of Moses and Joshua; ten times. Twenty-one times in the ministry of Elijah and Elisha; and forty-six times in the ministry of Christ and the apostles. There are only nine other times out of those three examples—Moses and Joshua; Elijah and Elisha; Jesus and the apostles—only nine other times stuck between those events. In the 1500-year history from the calling of Abraham to the end of the New Testament, that’s 86 times total. If you did the math on that, which I think I started with—it’s not very often.

Why is he doing that kind of thing? John 5—drop down to verse 36. This is one of many examples of the Bible giving clarity about what this is for. John 5:36: “But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John.” Now John got out there and preached, and he made it very clear that he was speaking as a mouthpiece for God, telling people—by the way, what everyone else had been telling people throughout the entire Old Testament—they needed to repent. He says, “But the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has”—now here’s the key thing—“sent me.”

Now that kind of “sent” with Jesus is different than “sent” from anybody else—from an Elijah, from an Elisha, from Jeremiah, from Isaiah, from John the Baptist. They were sent—that’s kind of saying you were just a kid, just a dude, and you got sent to do ministry. That’s not how Jesus speaks of being sent. As a matter of fact, here’s a better passage I should maybe send you to: Luke 7. This will be a little clearer—the idea of being sent by God **into the world**. That’s the only one in the Bible that we have “sent into the world,” which precedes the reality of human life on the planet. No one else—if I said, “What were you doing 1000 years ago?” you’re going to say, “Nothing.” Why? Because you didn’t exist. But you could go and sit there and talk to Jesus about what he was doing 2000 years ago, and he makes reference to this in John—that he’s hanging out with Abraham. “He



was excited to see my day,” you know, Abraham—it’s 2000 years before the coming of Christ. Those are the kinds of things that we mean when we talk about Jesus being sent into the world. This is a messianic claim.

Luke 7—drop down to verse 20: “And when the men had come to him”—they said (these disciples of John the Baptist), “John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come’”—that’s their shorthand for the coming Messiah—“or shall we look for another?” And in that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the good news preached to them.’” These are all lines—most of them—from Isaiah about the coming work of the Messiah, which is what? Nothing other than his credentials. “And blessed is the one who is not”—*skandalizetai*—“does not trip over, stumble over me.” They’re not offended by me—just not our use of the word “offended.”

Put it this way—number two (that was a lot of backstory for this): we need to look at a text like this and **affirm Christ’s credentials**. Which, by the way, I should say—when you word it like that, as I did last week—this is a series about us presenting Christ. All the things that we said last week are the things we need to present to the people we speak to about Christ. And so it is this week. The people we present Christ to—Christians, evangelists, people who are going to share the message of the gospel—they need to be real clear through your words that Christ is a compassionate God that, out of grace, sent his Son to save them. And secondly, that when he does these acts in the Gospels that you tell them to read about—these are the credentials of Christ that show that he has the power to save.

I guess the most extreme example of this is in John chapter 11. I know I’m turning you around a lot, but this one’s worth looking at—they’re easy to find. John chapter 11. I say this is the most dramatic because there’s no greater, more dramatic miracle than the dead being raised, which Jesus alluded to there in Luke chapter 7. If someone is raised from the dead—in this case, Lazarus—and you remember Lazarus was the brother of—he had two sisters, Mary and Martha. And he’s a friend of Christ’s. He lives in Bethany. They get news that he’s sick. If you just glance through this—verse number 3: “Lord, the one whom you love is ill.” This is John 11:4. “Now when Jesus heard of it, he said, ‘This illness does not lead to death.’” Now he knows that he’s going to die, but it’s not going to end that way. “It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was ill”—now this makes no sense, so you should underline it—“he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.” You get a call from a friend that you say you care about—this friend—they’re in need, and you stay two extra days. What’s that about? This is the point. Verse 11: saying these things, he finally makes it clear—we’re giving him time to die here. He says, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen

asleep, but I will go to awaken him.” That’s a euphemism. The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he’ll recover.” They weren’t catching the euphemism here. Now Jesus (verse 13) spoke of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Verse 14: Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died, and for your sake I’m glad that I was not there”—that’s why we waited a couple days here—“so that you may believe. Now let’s go to him.”

Drop way down to verse 21. They get there finally to the village of Bethany outside, east of Jerusalem, and Martha says to Christ, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” She says, I’ve seen you do that; I’ve heard of that; I know you can—you can cure people who are sick. “Even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give to you.” There’s a little, you know, wink-wink—I mean, I think you could even raise him from the dead; maybe you’ll do that. But even now—verse 23, rather—Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” No time indicators there. And Martha says, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” She was a good Sabbath School graduate—she understood about the resurrection taught in the Old Testament. Jesus said to her—now notice this—“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me”—now take your pencil and go back up to verse 14: “He died, and for your sake I’m glad I was not there so that you may believe.” This is the point of Christ’s coming—that we might believe. He makes sure Lazarus is dead because he wants people to believe in him.

Now, verse 25: “I am the resurrection and the life. If you believe in me, though a person dies, yet shall he live.” Hmm, okay. “And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” You see the double entendre—we’re not talking any longer about physical death. He just said even if he dies, then he’ll live; and if he believes in me, there’s never going to be a death. That’s a different kind of death. The Bible calls it, literally, the second death—the judgment for our sins. We won’t get it. “Do you believe this?” That’s the whole point. She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God”—who is, here it is again—“coming into the world.” That’s the whole point.

Why did Jesus heal people? He healed people because he was a compassionate person—didn’t need to—but more importantly, to show his credentials so that you and I could affirm the fact that he is the Messiah, so that we would place our trust in him—that he has the ability, the authority, and the wherewithal so that when I die, trusting in him, I won’t be judged. That’s the whole point—that though I die (Mike Fabarez will die, barring the rapture taking place), I will die. When I die, the Bible says if I trust in him, I’m going to avoid the second death, and I will live forever. One of the words the Bible likes to use for a life of blessing and reward—not a life of punishment and retribution. That is the promise—that’s the most important promise.

Because Lazarus—though you know the story; he gets raised from the dead after four days being dead—and what happened to him? He became a Ripley’s Believe It or Not, you know, caricature. Everyone wanted to see Lazarus because the news went out and touch him and talk to him about it and all that. Really, I mean, I’m glad he’s alive; Mary and Martha—sure. And I’m sure he probably



was glad because he was a young guy and had a lot left to do. But the problem with Lazarus is he died—he eventually died. This was no lasting solution to anything.

And I say all this, and the reason I set it up so carefully, is that some of you read the Bible of Jesus doing things like healings, and you say things like others have said and started movements on: “When do we get to see that stuff happen in our lives?” And the point of all that stuff was to affirm the credentials of Christ so that you would believe in him so that when you die, you would not face the judgment; you would believe that he is the Christ coming into the world, as Isaiah said, to take our iniquity on him so that we would be justified. That’s the point.

Because if Christ just came to keep us all healthy, you’d have some super-old Christians, would you not? And I, as I often say (tongue in cheek), all the faith-healers end up dying. The stats are one in one—they all die. You can carry this theology as long as you want and give people a lot of hope about a lot of things, and when they don’t get their healing and they don’t get better and they don’t recover, you can blame it on them—as evil and insidious as that is—but the bottom line: you’re misunderstanding what these things were for. Yes, there are expressions of Christ’s compassion. Does God now providentially show compassion in healing? He often does. But for you to expect the exceptional in your life is to try and quote Bible verses that were intended for a whole ’nother reason, and that is to affirm the credentials of Jesus Christ.

You want another passage on this? We don’t have time to look at it—Hebrews chapter 2, verses 1 through 4. What a great statement. It really gives us a pastoral exhortation, which is this: if it was affirmed in this way, then you better not ignore it. I mean, if Christ made his credentials clear, you better not ignore what he says. You walk into your doctor’s office, or your dentist’s office, or your optometrist’s office—you know what? Either they have no good pictures to put up, or they’re egocentric, because they got all their degrees up on the wall. Is that what it’s about? No, it’s not about ego, and it’s not that they’ve never been to an art show and can’t find art for their walls. What’s the point of putting the degrees up? So that when they want to slice you open, you’ll trust them. Is that not the reason? That’s a crass way to put it, but that is the reason, is it not? This guy’s got degrees; this guy knows what he’s doing; this guy’s been trained—I trust him. To display the credentials is to give you a sense of trust, so that when you face the crisis—ultimate crisis of death and facing your Creator—you’ll have confidence that even though you die, yet shall you live; and if you believe in him, you will never die. Those aren’t issues of physical death and physical health; these are issues of eternal salvation.

Luke 4, verse 41. If you weren’t here last week, you should listen to the sermon from last week (available there on our website), because we at least gave a little bit of a sidebar on this idea of demon-caused passivity, as we described it. But it says in verse 41 here, “And demons also came out of many, crying, ‘You are the Son of God!’ But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ.” Now, more on that in a second—why he shuts them up. But let’s recognize it wasn’t just physical healing. There were situations of, as the Bible



puts it elsewhere, affliction and oppression of the people that had some spiritual domination in their lives that caused nothing but harm and evil. What did we say last week—John 10:10? He comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Not good to have demonic oppression in your life. And Jesus here, with a word, ends up fixing these people as well.

And here's the point we made last week—and I told you it was a bad illustration, but it ended up working, because I got some good feedback on you understanding what we're talking about when we talk about the marriage illustration. Demonization can be illustrated with a marriage—which, again, may make you giggle, but that's the idea. It takes a kind of mutuality to bring together the dominant evil spirit in a life that is certainly not innocent, but one who's willing to collaborate. In other words, no one—I shouldn't say no one; there are a few examples in the Bible and they are extreme—but the standard practice in the Bible is that there is a kind of mutuality here that opens up the door to this kind of demonic oppression, affliction, or even demon-caused passivity.

Let's invert it for a second: in James chapter 4, what does it say? “Resist the devil and he will”—what?—“flee from you.” You know that passage. Now there's the picture. Now, the devil himself isn't going to spend any time on you, I trust. But his henchmen—if you resist them, they flee. That's a general principle and generally true. Invert that: if they don't flee and they get greater inroads in your life, what are you not doing? You're not—what?—resisting them. Or to put it in terms of James chapter 1, when you are tempted—and that's his job, and his henchmen, that's their job: temptation—we are carried away and enticed by our own desires. You give in to those. There's a giving in. Granted, there's an allurement that goes on, whatever the demonic thing is about—there's a kind of allurement. But here's what I'm trying to get at: he's delivering people from demonic oppression. How did they get there? The standard operating procedure in the Bible is: they were willing to carry along with their temptation and to spiral deeper and deeper into sin, and therefore the resistance was gone and there was increasing domination.

To free them from that—you want to talk about sickness being a part of the human race; that's one thing—but to engage in certain kinds of sin and to give in to certain kinds of temptation, and therefore to have—though we don't understand this well these days—a kind of oppression from demonic spirits in our lives, that shows the fact that you didn't get there innocently. You were a participant. You are guilty. You are culpable. And for Christ to come and fix that—I mean, that's extra grace. That's huge grace.

If I said, “Would you help me pay for my windshield? It got smashed.” And you'd say, “Well, how did you do it?” “Well, I chipped golf balls over my car in the driveway, and I keep smashing my window.” I would hope you wouldn't help me—teach me a lesson. “Well, that's stupid. You should pay for it yourself.” Why? Because you caused it. “Yeah, I know, but the car is just the perfect height for me to practice my flop shot. And so I get up there, and I just keep trying, but I've run out of money on fixing my windshield—would you help me?” No—don't help me.



For Christ to say, “I’m going to relieve people from demonic oppression”—with rare exception (and there are a few in the Bible, and you can point to them if you’re the Bible scholar, I get that)—but most times we see as a pattern and principle of Scripture: these people were culpable for their problem. It’s one thing to say you’re a part of the human race and you get sick and Christ comes in and heals you; but for you to sit there and say, “Now I have a problem that I caused myself—a very specific problem that I specifically caused myself”—that shows a kind of grace that’s amazing.

Now, we can see that here in this passage and how Christ did it. But if you want to look at the Bible and how he usually—here’s the rule, now again: this is a microcosm of the macrocosm, this bigger—we’re going to look at the big principle. When Christ chooses to relieve people from their big spiritual problems, it’s when people recognize and take ownership of their big spiritual problems. Would you agree with that? That’s the pattern we see. So what’s the pastoral exhortation?

Number three: confess your culpability. Not only should we value Christ’s compassion and affirm Christ’s credentials, you and I need to confess our culpability, because there are problems that Christ has come to solve—big problems. As a matter of fact, every big problem God has come to solve in your life was really something you participated in. And what we need to get to in the place of our own lives is: we’ve got to get to the place of recognizing that, and we need to get to the place of confessing it.

Remember that passage I quoted for us a couple weeks back in John chapter 9, where the Pharisees were really upset about the blind man that was healed? And it gets into this discussion at the end, and Jesus uses a lot of the metaphor of the blind man to talk to the Pharisees, and as he’s speaking in these double entendres, the Pharisees say, “Are you calling us blind?” And what did Jesus say? He said, “If you would confess—if you would agree—if you were blind, if you would think that you were blind, if you would have the mindset that you were blind, well then you would not be blind; your guilt would be removed. But because you claim to see, your guilt remains.” Remember that? That was the punch line of John 9—you can look it up sometime at the end of the chapter.

The whole point of the release from the damage that our sin causes is based on that very simple principle. To put it in another verse that you learned, I hope, as a kid—if not, let me give it to you: 1 John 1:9. I should start in verse number 8: “If we claim we’re without sin, we’re liars and we’re deceiving ourselves.” But verse 9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” There’s the principle of John 9—the blindness. If you claim you don’t have sin, you’ve got a problem, because then you’re not going to get freed from the penalty of your sin. But the grace of God is for people that recognize the penalty and the problem of their sin, and they’re willing to—here’s the key word in 1 John 1:9—**confess** it. “He is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

That's a great truth—confession. It simply means that we're willing to say the same thing that God says about our sin. It's that simple—really that simple. Now, the problem is, we have a hard time seeing ourselves. That's what the Bible is for; that, frankly, is what preachers are for. And frankly, when you share the gospel and present Christ to a lost world, that's what you're for—to help people see the problem of their sin. The Bible says it is a mirror, and the truth of the Word shows us our problem.

And here's the problem that we have: we have a hard time seeing our problem and an easy time seeing everybody else's problem. You know that. And I always illustrate that with our driving—and the accusations and fist-shaking. Some of you—I hope it's just this—you're shaking on the road. It is so funny because the things we condemn other people for, we do ourselves, do we not? But we just have a lot of excuses and reasons that we do. We drifted into the lane because we had a really good reason. I drifted into a lane yesterday—I was driving with my wife; she will confirm this—and the gal honked and got mad and—and you know what? I deserved it. But I also had a bug that was biting the back of my ankle at the time. Now I know that's a lame excuse, but ask my wife—I'm like, "Ah!" And I'm feeling this—either something really weird was happening, or there was a bug. But I had a bad pain. So I picked my foot up and I'm trying to kill something here, and I drifted into her lane. And I thought to myself, "You know what? I'm killing the bug right now, but I totally sympathize with her frustration." She didn't care what I'm doing; she sees the problem and she condemns it. I transgressed the lines—see, there on the pause? I transgressed the lines, and she got mad about it.

Problem is, all I have to do is send my private eye out to follow this gal for a week—she'll transgress the lines as well, and I'll bet she won't invite people to honk at her, because she says, "I've got reasons for doing it myself." That's the way we all work. We're very good at pointing out the other person's problem. Which, by the way, isn't that what Nathan did when Nathan came to David? Nathan was the prophet, the preacher, if you will. Here was David, committing adultery and hiding it, right? He had gotten his neighbor's wife pregnant. And so here comes Nathan, and what does he do—skillfully, exactly as the Bible often does, as Romans 2 explains? We're really good at seeing other people's [sins], so he paints a problem of someone else—someone comes and steals a sheep from a neighbor to slaughter it for a friend even though he had a bank account full of animals—a bank account, you know, a herd full—and David gets really mad, and he says, "The person who did that deserves to die." Great—crisp clarity the king has about the problem—which was just a ruse, an illustration. And you know the great line from Nathan in that passage, don't you? What does he say to David? "It's you, man. That's you."

Now, here's the problem for a lot of people—even when they have it crystal clear, as crystal clear as Nathan made it to David—they'll still start saying, "Ah, that's not me." That's exactly what Saul did when Samuel confronted him about his sin. The great thing about David, being a man after God's own heart, wasn't that he didn't sin. It's that when he was confronted with his sin, what did he do? He confessed it. He confessed it.



The great news of presenting Christ to a lost world, as we think about the judgment of God and the Christ as Judge, is then to get to a place—when that’s rightly understood—to talk about the compassion and the mercy of God, and that Christ is our merciful, caring, loving, forgiving Deliverer. And what we need to do is to see he has the credentials to do it. And this is not temporal salvation we’re concerned about. Matter of fact, the temporal things that he did to help people and heal people was nothing other than a sign for us to put our trust in him to deal with the ultimate problem of our lives. And what we’ve got to do is: confess our sins. “He is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

I said I’d deal quickly—and I probably don’t need to do this, and it feels out of place at this point. He told the demons to shut up and don’t tell anybody. You know why? Because, much like the problem with healing, the people of his day wanted a political savior. They wanted someone to relieve them from Rome’s heavy fist. They wanted to get out of the high taxation of the Roman Empire. They wanted a political deliverer. And if he allowed the demons to go around claiming early in his ministry, “He’s the Christ; he’s the Christ; he’s the Christ,” they would—as it says elsewhere—force him to be the king, the wrong kind of king. And this is a goal, too, as we call people to confession and repentance: we’ve got to keep it clear who we are presenting, and that is not a fix-all for your urgent desires. He may or may not do that in your life. But he’s fixing a bigger problem—a deeper problem. He tells these demons to shut up and not tell anybody this—not, as some commentators say, because he didn’t want the testimony of sinners or evil spirits—but because he didn’t (as he says elsewhere) want them promoting him to a place of political deliverer when he came to solve their spiritual problem. He’ll come back to set up a kingdom. The concern now is that we recognize our sin for what it is and get the benefit of the Messiah that came to live for us and die for us so that we could be forgiven.

Verses on that, by the way—if you’re a copious note-taker—John chapter 6, verses 14 and 15: that’s the quotation there of taking him by force and making him their king. Also, in Luke chapter 9, the same idea—Luke 9:20–22. Both of those sections will remind us why he tells these people to not proclaim him the Christ at this early stage in his ministry.

Christ is compassionate—merciful; loves us enough to save us. Christ is one with the credentials that we should recognize—we’re not just hoping against hope, but we’ve got a Christ who’s proved himself to solve our ultimate problem. The burden and onus on us is to confess our culpability. And we do that at the outset of the Christian life in a way that’s unlike any other. And if you’re not a Christian yet, that’s what God is waiting for from you—kind of open-handed, full acceptance of responsibility for whatever you have done to compound the problem of Adam in your own life; no excuses, no rationalization. And all of us can look back, if we are Christians, and see that as a life-changing moment in our lives. Call it repentance; we call it faith—those are two components of this idea of turning to him with complete trust, open confession.



But that's something that continues on in the Christian life. Does it not mean something as we continue to struggle with living a Christian life in a non-Christian world? It's something—as Jesus illustrated in that upper room as he washed their feet. He said, “You don’t need to wash all over again, but you just need to get your feet cleaned up.” And in walking through this world, we need to continually confess our sins.