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## **Jesus is Lord of All – 2. Lord Over Sickness – 6.7.9**

### **John 4:43-54**

**<sup>43</sup>After the two days he left for Galilee. <sup>44</sup>(Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) <sup>45</sup>When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there.**

**<sup>46</sup>Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. <sup>47</sup>When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.**

**<sup>48</sup>"Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe."**

**<sup>49</sup>The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies."**

**<sup>50</sup>Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live."**

**The man took Jesus at his word and departed. <sup>51</sup>While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. <sup>52</sup>When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour."**

**<sup>53</sup>Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed.**

**<sup>54</sup>This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee.**

This sermon, the second in our series on Jesus' miracles in John's Gospel, is entitled "Jesus Is Lord Over Sickness." I should state plainly that, as we look at the miraculous signs that Jesus did over the next several weeks, we're not simply learning about what kind of fella Jesus was when he walked the earth. We are looking at the very personality of our Father in Heaven, who never changes. Later in John, Jesus tells the disciples: "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." So, if it's true (as we said last week) that the man Jesus was "Lord Over Ordinary Life," that means our God is today Lord over our ordinary lives. He cares about the ordinary victories we receive and the ordinary messes we get ourselves into. And, as we'll consider this morning, if the man Jesus was Lord Over Sickness, then our God is today Lord over our sicknesses. When we look at Jesus, we're seeing the Father.

Is it possible to read the Bible and not come away believing that God is Lord over sickness? If you can do that, you are probably reading too fast. God announces himself to the Israelites in **Exodus 15:26 - "I am the Lord who heals you."** And he did heal them. God healed often in the OT. He healed during the time of Moses, during the time of the Kings, during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha.

When we get to the NT, and start reading about God's revelation of Himself through Jesus, we discover that God is still a healer. The Gospels, the longest of which contains only 28 chapters, record eighteen separate occasions where Jesus healed numerous people of physical sickness or injury, not counting exorcisms and raising people from the dead. John makes it clear near the end of his gospel that Jesus in fact did many more miracles than anyone had time or space to write about. He is the Lord Over Sickness.

In Galilee, a bureaucrat who undoubtedly worked for Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee, came to Jesus not as a royal official, but as a father. He came with a very human, very natural request. "My son lays dying in Capernaum. I beg you...will you please come and heal him?"

His request seems so understandable that Jesus' reply seems rude: "Unless you people see miraculous signs, you will never believe." I don't know for sure why he said it. Can you imagine what would happen to me if a church member called and said: "One of our children has just been hurt. Will you come and pray for her, that God will save her?" and I said: "You people! Unless God gives you miracles, you'll never serve him!" I do know that Jesus did a lot of teaching through seemingly "stray" comments like that. Maybe there was a crowd surrounding this man, an entourage from Herod's palace who said: "Hey, Joe's going to the healer about his little boy; let's tag along for the show."

But the father cut through any resistance on Jesus' part, and let the rebuke roll off his back. "Sir, please come now, before my child dies." Jesus said: "Go. He will live." And the father, showing a strong if simple faith, believed and left. No more begging. No pleading, "Please come and let's be sure." No, he took Jesus at his word and departed. Before long, he met up with some of his servants, and discovered that his boy had in fact been healed, at the exact hour when Jesus had said, "He's healed." And like the disciples (last week) who saw the water turned to wine, this man and his whole household saw this miraculous sign, and they believed in Jesus as a result.

Jesus reveals that our God is Lord over sickness, today as well as yesterday. The Bible testifies to this, from cover to cover. God heals! We should believe this strongly enough that we not only espouse it, but that we actually pray for people to get well! We can do this and still let God be God. We don't have to take an attitude that orders God around. But we should pray for people to get well.

Jesus is Lord over sickness. But that raises a question, even creates a problem. Jesus was clearly Lord over this boy's sickness. But what about my sickness? What about yours? What about that young mother of three you know about who may be dying, or what about all of the little children lying in Children's Hospital? Why doesn't the Lord Over Sickness intervene? Why doesn't he heal?

In order to get some perspective, let's first ask: Why does he heal sometimes? A fellow by the name of Jack Deere has developed an outline listing some major reasons from Scripture as to why God heals, and why he withholds healing:

Why God Heals:

**1. Out of Compassion and Mercy** - Sometimes the only motivation given for a healing miracle is the compassion of Jesus. One example: When Jesus heard of the execution of his cousin John the Baptist, he went away to be by himself. However, the crowds wouldn't leave him alone. But rather than get irritated with them, it says in **Mt. 14:14** - **"When Jesus landed and saw such a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick."** This is one of many such examples. Here are two implications for us. First, when we pray for the sick, we don't need to think up reasons to give ourselves, others, or God why he should heal whomever we're praying for. He already has more compassion on them than we do. He may not heal for other reasons, but we can pray for someone to get well, confident of his compassion. Second, we should make sure

our own prayer centers on compassion for the ones suffering, rather than on the desire to see an exciting miracle.

**2. To Glorify Himself and His Son** - The raising of Lazarus in **Jn. 11** comes to mind. When Jesus first heard that Lazarus was deathly ill, he told his disciples: **"This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory that God's Son may be glorified through it."** Later, when Jesus faced the grieving Martha, he told her: **"Didn't I tell you that, if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"**

**3. In Response to Faith** - Look no further than our text for today. This royal official came and asked Jesus to heal his son, and then went away at Jesus' word because he had faith. In other places, Jesus tells people whom he has healed: "Your faith has made you well." The folks who are healed in the Bible and commended for their faith are people who believe two important things: First, they believe that Jesus has the power to heal; second, they believe that he is kind enough to care about their problem. Not all of them are sure that he is willing to heal. One father who asks for his child to be healed confesses that his faith is a little shaky: "I believe...help thou my unbelief." Their faith may not be perfect, but they do have faith enough to put themselves out and come to Jesus, and he responds to their faith.

**4. In Response to His Own Promise** In **James 5:13-18** it says: **<sup>13</sup>Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup>Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup>And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup>Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.**

**<sup>17</sup>Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. <sup>18</sup>Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.**

Since God is not a liar, the fact that he has promised to heal means that he will sometimes heal. At the same time, you'd have to stretch to say that he has promised to ALWAYS heal in this passage and others. Therefore, how can we not pray for it? God sometimes heals in response to his own promise.

Now, let's look at a few reasons Why God Doesn't Heal. Usually when I ask people to talk about unanswered prayer, most of the answers focus on God. "His will is sovereign, he has purposes we cannot understand, he wants to shape us and make us mature through our suffering." True. But it's almost as if there is a blind spot that keeps us from thinking that maybe we have something to do with it. In truth, there may be some problems in our own faith that keep God from answering our prayers, as seen in the first three reasons:

**1. Apostasy** - To become apostate is to totally wander away from the faith. The children of Israel kept wandering away from God and turning to idols in the OT, and when they did so, they stopped seeing God's miraculous power working among them. If a church or a Christian claims to worship God, but really worships money, sex, or power, it's self-evident that God won't do many miracles among them. Or if a church has wandered into teachings that clearly contradict what the Bible says, God will not move among them.

I've heard it said that God will not answer our prayers if we have unconfessed sin in our lives. That's a little too simplistic. I'm confident that I have unconfessed sin in my life that I'm not yet aware of - attitudes of pride or selfishness or self-reliance, etc. If I have to be sinless before I pray for you, I'll never pray for you. But there is a real problem when I'm harboring sin - enjoying it, hiding it, deceiving myself about its seriousness. In **Ps. 66:18**, the psalmist writes: **"If I had**

**cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."** I want to sound this warning very carefully. Some of you have trouble breaking free from the guilt that Satan heaps on you for your sins. You are in a constant state of remorse, but Satan won't let you break free into the joy of God's grace. This Scripture I just read isn't speaking to you. You don't cherish sin. You fight it everyday, just like the rest of us. But others of you need to listen to this Scripture immediately. You're not simply leaning on God's grace like you think you are - you are cherishing sin. You don't really care about it. It isn't serious to you. But that is effectively building a cinderblock wall between you and God. If you keep it up, your heart may become so calloused that you leave God entirely!

**2. Legalism and Lukewarm Faith - Isa. 29:13** describes the situation at some churches: **"These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men."** Do you understand what legalism is? It isn't being scrupulous about your morals - we should do that. It's trusting in your religious practice, rather than God, for your salvation. Legalism says: "I'm righteous because of what I do and what I don't do." And to be lukewarm, of course, is to be half-committed to God - only interested in him for what he can do for me, and only mildly interested at that. Such "faith" won't see lots of answers to prayer. God is hardly in the picture at all, so why should we expect miracles?

**3. Unbelief** - In **Mark 6:5** we're told that Jesus could do very few miracles in his hometown of Nazareth because the people there didn't have any faith in him. Listen to what Jack Deere says about this: *"If you haven't seen any truly miraculous healings, ask yourself how often you pray for these things. I am not talking about the kind of ritualistic prayers where an absentee sick person's name is mentioned in a list with others in a Sunday service so that we can ask God to guide the doctors' hands, comfort the family, and let them know that all things work together for good. These kinds of prayers are frequently offered as a pastoral courtesy with no real expectation or anticipation that God will do a miracle...how often do you go into a hospital room, and pray for the sick and suffering to be miraculously healed? How often do you lay hands on the sick in your church and pray for them? Most of the people I talk with who have never seen a miracle are people, by and large, who never take the trouble to go and lay their hands on sick people in believing prayer...the surprising thing to me today is not how little God heals among the conservative evangelical church, but that he heals at all. So much of the church is filled with unbelief that I am truly amazed that anyone ever gets healed"* (Surprised ... pp. 153-54).

I truly believe that it's better to ask God for the wrong things than to ramble through a prayer that asks for nothing at all.

Now, after three factors in us that cause God to withhold healing, here are two factors that are God's responsibility. God sometimes withholds healing...

**4. To Build Perseverance** - The best example of someone praying for relief from suffering and not being granted his wish is Paul and his mysterious "thorn in the flesh" in **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** - **<sup>7</sup>To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. <sup>8</sup>Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. <sup>9</sup>But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup>That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

We learn much more through the tough times of life than through the good. John Cheever said that the main emotion of the adult American who has had all the advantages of wealth,

education, and culture is disappointment. The thing we must learn to trust God about is that he may have something more important for one of us to receive than healing.

**5. Because of His Sovereign Timing & Sovereign Mysteries** - This is the all-important catch-all category into which we must throw all the withheld miracles we don't understand, and let God be God.

We sometimes think that if God would do more miraculous healings on Christians in hospital beds, that healthcare workers would be amazed, and would see the glory of God, and would want to serve him. Maybe. But it is possible too that healthcare workers would see the glory of God revealed even more profoundly when a Christian faces a long terminal illness with faith, hope, and love for God, with a certainty that a loving Father waits on the other side of death. After all, not everyone will get healed, so the fact that he heals you may not inspire me. But everyone will die. If I see God's glory in your death, I will be seeing something I'll need someday. So God has reasons for not healing us that are known only to Him.

And that's really what it means to say that Jesus is LORD over sickness – that is, that he's the boss, he's the decider, he's the one working the plan of history and that includes sickness and health, life and death.

But from a position of faith, we can and must ask him to heal. After all, he has revealed a compassion for the sick and a willingness to heal. Let's never let it be said that healing doesn't come because we fail to ask in faith, or even to ask at all. As we pray (even today), let us not be afraid to ask God to heal. If he heals, we will see his glory in that. And if he does not, I believe that he will still show us that he is Lord Over Sickness. In the act of praying, we'll get to know Him better, and we'll begin to see his heart.