

Introduction

Imagine if you were sick or could not walk for 38 years. Imagine if Jesus healed you from that. Imagine if Jesus then said, “Don’t fall into sin so that nothing worse will happen to you.” What could be worse than being sick for 38 years? We’ll find out today.

264 HH – Holiness Looks Like Jesus 4

1 John 2:6 says: “Those who say they live in God should live as Jesus did.”

Wow! That is a small verse with a big challenge. Those of us who say we live in God, that is, that we are in him and he is in us, should live, then, as Jesus lived because Jesus’ life was the expression of God in the world. I don’t think this means that we have an itinerant ministry and that all of us walk around preaching and saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand. But, if we say that we are in Christ and that Christ is in us, then our lives should bear a big resemblance to Jesus’ life. In other words, we should have the same love as he had. We should have the same passion for God’s will as he had, and we should be holy as he is holy.

In our series, we have discovered what that did not mean and what it did mean. It did not mean that God or Christ walked around with a frown ready to beat someone over the head when they failed. That would be a self-righteous Pharisee, but certainly not God. But we must understand this as well. It did not mean that God winked his eye at man’s sin as if sin were OK. It wasn’t.

Do you remember the story of the woman caught in adultery? Legally, she did deserve to be stoned. She was an adulteress, as well as the man she sinned with, although the Pharisees conveniently did not include him in their accusation, but that is another story. In that event Jesus said, “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone,” and of course, none of the woman’s accusers were without sin so all of them had to walk away. There was one in attendance who was without sin – Jesus. He said to the woman, “Woman, where are your accusers? Does no one condemn you?” She replied, “No one, Lord,” and Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.”

What a magnificent statement – “neither do I condemn you, go, and sin no more.” Here we find the heart of the good news of Jesus Christ. It is a twofold message. It is a double-edged sword to pierce the soul of every man. One edge of the sword pierces with the words, “I do not condemn you.” This comes as utter relief for we know we deserve condemnation. We know we have done wrong. We know we are guilty, but the Holy, Spotless God of light says, “I do not condemn you.” We are stunned by the grace of God.

But the sword of grace that cuts to the quick with its mercy cuts in another way for Jesus also said, “Go and sin no more.” Jesus did not come to lower the standards of God. That would be an impossibility. That would overthrow the universe for the standards of God are not some arbitrary list of do’s and don’ts but the expression of his character, the expression of his essence, the expression of who he is. Jesus came to uphold the standard of God, to uphold the character of God,

to uphold the holiness of God. We can say that Jesus not only came to rescue sinners, but he came to rescue the name of God and the holiness of God from the misrepresentations and the twisted expressions of self-righteousness that the religious people promoted in that time. So, after he told the woman, “Neither do I condemn you,” he also said, “Go and sin no more.”

What a crucial message for our day! We love to exalt the grace of God. We love to be relevant. We love to dress in a certain way to show we are cool, that we are normal like others, that we are not “holier than thou.” John Eldredge in his book called it the big “PR campaign for Jesus.” But I fear that we have carried the message of grace – “We do not condemn you,” and have failed to carry the message of holiness – “Go and sin no more.” And I fear that too many people have heard a message of love and acceptance but have not heard the loving message to turn away from sin and to pursue the righteousness of God.

We don’t want to offend, or we have had a background with self-righteous, judgmental people and we don’t want to be that way. Understood. But we must bring that message, “Go and sin no more. Go and pursue holiness.” Why? Because if we love people we will remember that sin brings unhappiness. Sin brings problems. Sin brings decay. Sin brings crises. Sin brings death. Sin cuts life short.

Our twofold message is a twofold message of joy. “Rejoice because the Lord does not condemn and rejoice because the Lord points you to a way of life that brings more joy, the way of righteousness.”

Jesus made the same point when he healed a man who had been lame 38 years. This story is found in John 5. Many sick people were lying in an area in the city of Jerusalem by a pool of water and out of all the sick people, Jesus selected a man who had been lame 38 years. Can you imagine being sick for a lifetime and then being completely delivered from that? That would be cause for rejoicing.

So, Jesus healed the man, told him to take up his bed and go home. The only problem is that it was the Sabbath, and when the man obeyed Jesus the Sabbath police caught him and wanted to give him a ticket! He shouldn’t be carrying his bed on the Sabbath. But the man didn’t want a ticket from the Sabbath police, so he told them what happened, “I’ve been lying here for 38 years. Then a man came to me, healed me, and told me to take up my bed and go home.” When they asked, “Who healed you? Who told you to do this?” The man didn’t know. Jesus didn’t identify himself, and so the Sabbath police said, “Well, when you find out, you let us know so we can deal with him.”

Don’t you find it amazing that these religious leaders completely lost sight of the miracle in front of them! But, that’s another story, and I must get back to the point I’m making. Right after the man talked with these religious leaders, Jesus found him in the Temple area and guess what he said, “I made you well, but as you go, don’t sin, so that nothing worse may come to you.” Wow! What could be worse than being lame in your legs for 38 years and not be able to walk? Jesus said there was something worse than that.

On television, we see and hear all kinds of human interest stories that warm our hearts. Stories of people who are rescued, or people who are healed by the medical profession, or people whose misfortune has taken a sudden turn for good and their life has changed. These are good stories and they are encouraging to hear. But wouldn’t it be something, if, after these stories, a news anchor

came on and said, “And so tonight, as we conclude our program, we do indeed rejoice that these good things have happened to this person, and we also pray that this person will stay away from sin so that nothing worse will happen to him.” Ohhhh! That would create a firestorm of controversy in the country. People would be yelling and screaming and saying, “How can you say that? How can you be so insensitive? How can you be so judgmental?”

But that’s what Jesus said to this man. Out of all the things he could have said, Jesus chose to say, “Don’t sin anymore so that nothing worse happens to you.” What could be worse than being lame for 38 years? I will tell you, it would be living a life of sin for 38 years and reaping the consequence of that sin in this life and in the life to come. That would be worse.

No, Jesus was not soft on sin. He also told them to stay away from sin. Friends, this causes me to bow my head in earnest prayer to the Lord for I look upon my life and see so much failure. I see a lot of grace, too, and I see that God has been merciful to me, and it motivates me to move forward and gain more grace to live a righteous life. I see Jesus telling me repeatedly, “Jonathan, stay away from sin in all its forms.” I see Jesus saying this to you, today.

I believe this is what Jesus would have for his Church. I believe he would have this double-edged message of “I do not condemn you” on one side and “Go and sin no more, go and pursue holiness with God’s people” on the other side. The Church desperately, desperately needs it. I read to my great concern the other day a survey of young unmarried adults, 18-29, who claimed to be evangelical Christians. A stringent 6-point test was given to determine if they were really born again. Of those, 25%, 1 in 4, said they were sexually active within the previous three months. Another 19% said while they were not currently sexually active within the previous three months, they had been sexually active.

That report discouraged me for days. I share it with you for prayer. I share it with you to look to your own life. I share it so that I may look to my own life and to guard my own heart. I share it to remind us that sin does not bring happiness, but holiness does, and that a priority for Jesus is for us to pursue holiness in our lives. What did holiness look like on Jesus? It looked like him identifying with sinners through his baptism, it looked like him not focusing on people as the enemy, it looked like him releasing people from bondage, it looked like him celebrating with people over their deliverance ...

..., and it looked like him pointing the way to a holy life because the path of sin brings pain and sorrow while the highway of holiness brings joy. It brings the happiness of holiness for all who walk with him.