

Universal Healthcare. They say its coming. That it will be free. Now maybe I don't understand it like I should, but I am thinking, why is it needed. If a poor person has some emergency health needs, they can go to the emergency room at the hospital and are treated at no cost. In addition, if a serious operation is needed, Medicaid or the hospital will cover the expenses. I have been thankful to God that the congregations I have served have provided my family with Blue Cross Blue Shield Insurance. But now there is talk of ending private insurance companies. That the government will oversee healthcare. When I think of the government running something, it usually ends up going bankrupt, and the quality is not always great. Think of Amtrack or the United States Postal system. Jim Petrie, a winter member of Open Bible is from Canada. They have a type of universal healthcare there. He tells me that when you reach a certain age, certain medical procedures are no longer allowed to take place. That the waiting time for procedures can take up to a year or more. Obviously, the cost to fund this program is phenomenal. And it is not free. Heavy taxes are placed on working people, to provide this care for all. In addition, universal healthcare lowers all salaries of doctors and healthcare providers. As a result, it will open the door to foreign doctors entering our country who may not be as well trained as American doctors. The point I am making, Universal Healthcare is peddled as free. But it really isn't free. Today, Jesus Christ is offering to all you terminally ill people, a healthcare plan that is truly free. No second rate doctors, procedures won't be halted when you are over 65, no burdensome taxes that will bankrupt you. Don't wait. Sign up with this policy before you go into eternal cardiac arrest. Consider today: Universal Healthcare That Is Truly Free!

Our first patient today is a man named Matthew or Levi. As we look at our Gospel reading, we find Jesus, his disciples, and I am sure, a large crowd of admirers, walking into the town of Capernaum. Jesus sees Matthew sitting in the tax booth doing what he did best, collecting taxes, probably tariffs from the merchants that were passing through on the way to other parts of the country.

In the Jewish mind, the tax collector, especially the Jewish tax collector, was a dishonorable person. First, the Jewish tax collector was working for the Roman government, so he was seen as a sort of traitor. Second, the tax collector made his living by overcharging, cheating the people he was collecting the taxes from.

Matthew's original name was Levi. The Hebrew name "Levi" means "joined" or "connected." He was sure connected to making money in the wrong way just as Bernie Madoff some years back with his ponzi schemes made off with lots of money in the wrong way. But then after Jesus came to him and showed him mercy, his name was changed to Matthew which means, "The gift of God."

Jesus said "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, and sexual immorality, theft, false testimony and slander." I am born into this world connected to a sinful nature that tells me to take the biggest piece of the candy bar for myself and give the smallest piece to my brother or sister. Do you remember that time you took the biggest piece for yourself? What made this even worst was the way you tried to justify what you were doing with thoughts that you were the oldest, or you worked harder, or your brother wouldn't care if you took the biggest piece. There was some point in Matthew's life and Bernie Madoff's life where they made excuses for themselves and justified what they were doing, even though it was wrong in the eyes of the community and also in the eyes of God.

I want to read to a few excerpts from Martin Luther's Large Catechism where he expounds on how stealing from others is such a large part of our sinful nature and the world in which we live. "So if all the thieves who did not want to be known as thieves were to be hanged on the gallows, the world would soon be devastated. There would be a lack of executioners and gallows." He goes on to say how people steal from their employers when they fail to put in a good days work. When they take money under the table. Have you ever worked with someone who spends way too much time gossiping instead of working at their job? Luther describes the people who overcharge for services. Or those who drive a hard bargain in buying and selling and the swivel chair robbers. Have you ever seen the old Leslie Thrasher painting where a butcher is putting the thumb on the scale to make the meat weigh more, and on the other side of the scale the woman has her thumb under the scale to make it weigh less? In every case of greed and stealing, the person reaches a point where they justify what they are doing wrong and that makes the sin doubly evil.

Jesus came to Matthew as he was sitting at the table. There he was with his list of names of people who needed to pay the taxes. And there he was with his box full of money, part of it went to the Romans and part of that money was going into his own pocket. It is not easy to handle money. How am I going to spend the pay check I received or the money in the bank account? Jesus said "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Will I justify spending money foolishly with all sorts of foolish excuses? Lord Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner.

Then he hears that Jesus is passing by, the miracle man of Nazareth. The man who heals people and makes them whole. "What will Jesus say to me", Matthew wonders. Will he rebuke me before the crowd. Will he judge me as I deserve. Maybe he can help me with my illness? And what did Jesus say? Jesus said, "Follow Me."

Matthew's life was changed forever. It was changed because Jesus had chosen him to be a disciple. Matthew asked no questions of Jesus, as did the rich young man who could not leave his goodies, for our text tells us that Matthew got up and followed him. No questions, no information asked for, just an instant response to Jesus' invitation. Matthew was sick, he knew that he needed a Savior, a doctor for his sins. His conscience troubled him for the people he had ripped off. And he believed this Jesus could provide him the cure.

A short-time later, Jesus ends up having dinner at Matthew's house. And all Matt's friends were there. All those despicable IRS appeals agents. All his junior executive pals who sneak cocaine snorts in the bathroom. All his drinking buddies. All the brown nosers and opportunists who manage to crash these kind of parties. Maybe even a few prostitutes looking to do a trick to get a paycheck for the night. And there is Jesus right in the thick of this mess of humanity. A bunch of sick people.

"And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, Why does your teacher eat with Tax collectors and sinners?" Why does he hang out with those kind of people? Doesn't Jesus know how it looks to be seen with people like that? Hasn't anyone told Him that being around those people will drag you down into worldliness? The Pharisees felt they were healthy. They were good society people. They didn't need the doctor Jesus.

We are quick to jump on these Pharisees for their behavior. But are we any different? We quickly look down on certain people in our society. Look at those

hoodlums who are throwing bricks and looting and burning down stores. Look at that internet list of sex offenders listed in Sumter or Marian County. Look at the panhandler, on the side of the road who is trying to get people to throw cash into his box.

And then we tend to label certain professions. How ready are we to hold suspect anyone who claims to be a Christian and then reveals that they are a Hollywood celebrity, a progressive Democrat, or a Theology Professor at Harvard. But Jesus sees through vocation and straight into the heart. Since Jesus did... So should we. No one is above the cross or beneath grace. Senator or Soup kitchen regular. God makes no distinction. The Bible is clear. "There is no one righteous, no not one". We are all as an unclean rag, and all our righteousness, are as filthy rags." To God, sin is sin. There is no rating scale. Whether you have shot someone in the back while they are running away from you, or told a little lie, both are looked upon by God as an aggressive cancer. Everybody in our world is terminally ill. And there is only one physician who can provide us with the medicine we need to cure us. And that person is Jesus. Jesus went to the cross for a reason. The reason is simple, "By his stripes we have been healed." We are once again whole before God. The payment for our healthcare has been paid by a medical insurance like no other. Not Blue Cross, Blue Shield! But Christ's Cross, Red Shield! Jesus provides Universal Healthcare That Is Truly Free!

And what God wants to see in our lives as a result of our being made whole and holy before God is mercy. Mercy. Do we even have the slightest notion what it means? The way it is used here—It means tendered heartedness. It means "active compassion" "Compassion in Action" This isn't just Mercy...It's Extreme Mercy... like Mercy on a bungee cord or Wind Surfing Mercy.

The Pharisees were like many church members today. They feel that they are really not in need of God's mercy. These church members come to church every week. They toss their offerings into the offering basket. They look for ways to serve and do volunteer work in the church. But they are doing this, as a ritual. They are simply going through the motions. To make themselves and others feel good. They think that these rituals will in some way earn their way to heaven. . But our God is not interested in an outward show. He is not interested in sacrifice. He is interested in us seeing our lost condition, and our desperate need for a Savior. And when we recognize how much Jesus means to us, we just can't keep it to ourselves. We want to show mercy and tell others as Matthew did.

Matthew is evidence that God does not give up on people. That it matters little to God how far you have walked away from Him. God wants us to repent and turn and follow Him. God wants us to have the same attitude towards those we meet. That there are no lost causes, no worthless people, no people that God does not love.

Healthcare Reform is desperately needed in the U.S. Guess what, we don't need a politician to make it happen. We can make it happen! Share Jesus and what HE has done for us, and watch the cancer of sin disappear. Open Bible church is not a museum for saints but a hospital for sinners. At this church we have a welcome sign over our doors. It says, Cocaine Addicts, Alcoholics, Ex cons, Upper class, Middle Class, Lower class. All are Welcome Here! Healthcare by Jesus. No health condition denied treatment. All Cured! All Spiritually Fit, Forever! Amen.