

Is There No Balm in Gilead?

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon emphasizes the need for the Body of Christ to admit its sickness and seek the Physician's healing and restoration.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:5, Jeremiah 8:18, Matthew 5:4, Luke 7:11, Revelation 3:3

Topics: "Repentance", "Spiritual Restoration"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches about the urgent need for the Body of Christ to acknowledge its spiritual sickness and turn to the Physician, Jesus Christ, for healing and restoration. Drawing parallels from the story of Jerusalem's denial of its impending destruction, he emphasizes the importance of repentance and seeking God's forgiveness for individual and corporate sins. Bieber highlights the danger of ignoring symptoms of spiritual decline, such as unbelief, compromise, and lukewarm faith, and calls for a genuine mourning and repentance within the church to experience the transformative power of God's grace and resurrection.

Transcript

My grief is beyond healing, my heart is sick within me. Hark, the cry of the daughter of my people from the length and breadth of the land: "Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her King not in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images, and with their foreign idols? The harvest is past, the summer is ended and we are not saved." For the wound of the daughter of my people is my heart wounded, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me.

Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?

Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored? Jeremiah 8:18-22

Soon afterward he went to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." And he came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you arise." And the dead man sat up,

and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" And this report concerning him

spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country. Luke 7:11-17

The physician can see that his friend's fever and rash are not just minor symptoms... They're part of a syndrome that spells sure death if the disease isn't given attention... And the physician knows exactly what to do for his friend. With a little cooperation he could be perfectly cured in two months.

But, if the friend keeps laughing it off, if he refuses to take warning, what can the physician do?

The man's wife pleads with him.

"Fred, listen to your friend. You're not well. You've lost so much weight. You're getting weaker every day."

"Get off my back woman. I'm all right. After Christmas we'll take a vacation down south and get some rest and sunshine."

The man keeps getting weaker. Christmas Eve he collapses on the living room floor and dies. At the funeral people shake their heads.

"The man had a curable disease. His best friend was a doctor. Why didn't he do something for him?"

Ah, but the doctor was never given a chance.

And if there is sickness in the Body of Christ which the people won't admit, what can the Physician do?

When Jeremiah spoke those words, the people of Jerusalem scoffed, "What's the matter with you, Jeremiah? We're not sick! Jerusalem is in good shape. You're the one who's sick!"

Jerusalem went on about its business.

- The priests in the temple prepared the sacrifices and looked after the crowds.
- The king and his court were busy with their social life.
- There was still plenty to buy in the market, and money to buy it.

Granted, wars were going on all around them. Granted, there were rumors of an approaching siege from Nebuchadnezzar's army, but that all seemed unreal.

As the months passed, things in Jerusalem began looking bad. Jeremiah kept calling the people to turn to God, and the leaders of the city kept protesting that things were fine, their troubles were only minor.....

- even when the siege was laid and no one could come or go from the city,
- even when food became scarce and water was short,
- even when people started dying,

still the leaders insisted "things will be all right soon."

Right up until the day the Chaldean army broke through and the king fled and was captured, and his sons were slain before him, and his eyes were put out, and the temple was destroyed, and the people were led away in chains... right up until they couldn't deny it, people kept saying, "Jeremiah, you're morbid."

And all this was so unnecessary. Jerusalem could have been healed long before things really got bad. Jeremiah saw the sickness, which anyone with eyes could see, and cried out. "Why is this? Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored?"

Throughout the Body of Christ here, and across the city, and doubtless in many other places, we are seeing symptoms which, taken by themselves, perhaps don't seem very dangerous.

A brother or sister falling away... What's so strange about that? Brothers and sisters have been falling away since the beginning. After all, "Many are called but few chosen."

Believers at each other's throats... We know that that's been going on since the earliest days of faith.

Disciples turning lukewarm and starting to compromise.

Lives that were made pure stumbling back into immorality.

Laborers getting weary.

Love turning cold.

Men and women of God losing that vision.

We could go on and list many other symptoms. But the real problem is not these things in themselves, bad as they are. The real problem is twofold and it's exactly what Jeremiah came up against.

1. Nobody will admit that there's anything seriously wrong.
2. Nobody pays attention to the Physician who offers healing.

When we have a wounded thigh like Jacob, or a thorn in the flesh like Paul, these things don't hinder the flow of God's grace. God's grace is made perfect in our weakness. But when we are sick with unbelief, fear, anger, lust, covetousness, hypocrisy, hardness of heart, when the whole Body is infected with these things and still we go right on pretending that we're well... then we're in trouble.

Sure, these things happened in the apostolic church. And what did the Lord do about it? He called it to repentance.

"Remember then from what you've fallen and repent!"

"Remember what you have received and heard; keep that and repent. If you do not awake, I will come like a thief and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you."

There is a balm in Gilead. There is a Physician. And he's standing in the midst of his church with eyes like flames of fire and feet like burnished bronze. In his right hand he holds seven stars. From his mouth issues a sharp two edged sword. And his face is like the sun, shining in full strength.

When will his church admit that she needs his healing touch? When will she turn and call upon him for cleansing and forgiveness?

The church of Jesus Christ doesn't need seminars, and clinics, and conferences, and endless remedial meetings to bring itself to life. These things will never do it! And don't be misled by the size of the crowds. Don't be lulled to sleep by the fact that you hear people praising God here and there.

Sure there are meetings, Bible studies and church services all over town... but the work isn't getting done! The Lord of the Harvest keeps calling laborers into his harvest... yet the harvest stands there waiting to be reaped. Ninety percent of the energy in our fellowships is spent taking care of ourselves...

- babysitting each other,
- sympathizing with each other,
- exhorting each other,
- gossiping about each other,
- wrestling with inner temptations and conflicts.

And with whatever strength that's left, we're trying to proclaim the Kingdom of God. And the world looks at us and says, "That's the Kingdom of God? Thanks, I'll take Burger King."

Our city won't feel the impact of the gospel until the Body of Christ here is healed, and cleansed, and raised from its drunken stupor, lifted out of its preoccupation with itself, and made to stand on its own two feet and speak with a clear mind and a strong voice.

All it takes is for some gathering of believers, somewhere, to admit that they need healing... not just for bad backs and jumpy nerves, but for the Body itself.

All it takes is for some congregation, somewhere, to admit that it has not been what it was called to be and to start weeping before the Lord for its corporate sin and its corporate death.

As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep,"...

and then he raised her son from the dead. Her weeping brought him near to her with life from heaven.

"Why are you weeping?" he said to Mary Magdalene, and manifested to her the power of his resurrection.

"Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, will visit his church with life when he sees her mourning for her dead condition. Mourning..... not criticizing.

A lot of us are highly critical of the way things are in the Body. But a critical spirit never brings life from God. All a critical spirit ever produces is more death.

Many of us feel that we're gifted with discernment about the condition of the Body and we become quite upset because nobody seems interested in our profound insights. But while we're diagnosing and discerning and criticizing we're failing to do one thing:

- we're failing to admit that we are part of the disease!

We're not the Physician... We're part of the sickness. The Physician is standing in our midst waiting for a chance to heal us, waiting for us to come down off our pedestals and repent for our part in this disease.

He was wounded for our transgressions.

He was bruised for our iniquities.

Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole.

And with his stripes we are healed.

The bread of the Holy Communion we eat is not just the body broken for someone else's healing... Not even the body broken for the healing you needed before you became a believer... It's His body broken for the healing you need today... For the sickness of arrogance and self-righteousness and unbelief you brought with you today.

And the wine we drink is not just the blood shed for someone else's sins... Not even the blood shed for sins you committed before you became a believer... But His blood shed for the sin of stubbornness and rebellion against God's grace you brought with you today.

Jesus has so much more for us than we have now. But the healing and the forgiveness of our crucified Lord cannot flow in until we admit our need of them.

May God, in his mercy, enable us to face the truth about ourselves and help us, with broken hearts, to draw near to the only Physician in all the world who can heal us.

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole,

There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.

There is a Physician standing in the midst of the children of Zion who is able to make them strong in the strength of God right now.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/richard-e-bieber/is-there-no-balm-in-gilead/>

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