

Advent 3—A  
Matthew 11:2-11  
God's Healthcare Plan

In his first year in office, President Obama expended a huge amount of energy to get his healthcare reform bill passed. Were you excited about that and supportive? Or were you opposed to it? What do you think of Obama Care? It was the most significant and massive achievement, legislatively, for President Obama in his first year by a mile, wouldn't you agree? He spent a lot of political capital and it was a close vote but he prevailed. If you have a family and let's say, one of your kids is in his twenties and is out of school but doesn't have health insurance, you probably love the Obama Care provisions; you're thrilled about that. On the other hand, if you own a small business and you see ahead a whole bunch of new regulations and paperwork that are going to cut into your work time and become part of your overhead then you're probably not too thrilled. If you have a preexisting physical ailment or condition of some kind and you've had trouble getting insurance, then you probably love the concept of this healthcare reform. On the other hand, if you're worried about inflation and already wonder about the size of the federal deficit, and if you greatly expand the amount of benefits that can apply to people where is the money going to come from to pay for all of that? It isn't going to come from greater efficiencies. It doesn't work like that because governments are not naturally efficient. So you might worry that this will only plunge our country into deeper debt.

So it's a divided house. I'll bet half of you who are listening to me right now are in favor of it and probably half of you are against it. But I'd like to talk to you not about political or actual physical healthcare and its delivery system in our country today. I'm much more interested in talking to you about the benefit plan that comes to you and to me through the Lord Jesus. Psalm 103 talks about the benefit plan that comes to believers. In Psalm 103 the Bible tells us: "*Forget not all his benefits. He forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.*" And today I'd like to talk to you about Dr. Jesus and being part of his healthcare plan. And I'd like you to turn to the gospel of St. Matthew in chapter eleven and our story today starts in verse two.

I'd like to remind you of what happened right before this. Jesus came across a funeral procession. You've got to imagine how this looked—here's this cortege, this line of people walking out to the graveyard. Six strong men are perhaps carrying a wooden casket on their shoulders; its lid nailed down. A grieving widow is coming behind who not only has her heart ripped out because her son has died, but also now has no obvious means of support because she had already lost her husband at this point. She counted on those two men to help her live. So that's a miserable woman. And Jesus spoke a word and gave life back to that young man. And imagine what that would have looked like! The people were wondering: "Did anything happen?" and suddenly they're all hearing: "Boom, boom, boom. Let me out!" and somehow the lid on the casket came off and the young man sits and begins to speak. That was a happy moment! But then came a stressful discussion about what Jesus was actually able to do as it touches the ministry of his herald, John the Baptist.

Jesus' promotional agent—his name was John the Baptist—was a truth teller and frankly, he didn't care who was listening. He would get right into the face of the Pharisees and tell them that they were a brood of vipers. But he also had a heartwarming message of where people could find forgiveness of their sins. The beautiful metaphors in Psalm 103 describing forgiveness John the Baptist attributed to the Lamb of God who takes away what? The sin of the world. But he also had the courage to tell the truth to the governor of the northern half of the country—Galilean Trakonitus, the regions up north—Herod the II or Herod Antipas. And Herod had coveted his brother's wife, his sister-in-law, Herodias. As you'd say today on TV, she was "hot." She was beautiful and not only was she good looking, but she apparently also had the ability to turn on her sexuality and point it toward certain targets. She was also a greedy and opportunistic woman and figured she could do better than old Herod Philip and she set her eyes on the governor, her brother-in-law, and basically turned on the charm. Guys, you know what I'm talking about, right? I'm squirming here, just nod, just say: "I know what you're talking about." She turned it on and he fell for it and wanted her and took her and John the Baptist said: "You're committing adultery. You can't expect God to bless that. In fact, he's going to condemn you for what you've done." And not only did this irritate Herod Antipas, but Herodias was steaming because

this was her plot to advance and enrich herself. She became a sort of queen. Really more like Mrs. Governor, but since he called himself a king she could get to pretend she was a queen. John the Baptist is messing with her political path and she didn't like it one bit. And when Herod wanted to do something to make John the Baptist shut up he threw him in prison.

It's not going to end well. He's going to die in prison; he's never going to leave. But at the time that this resurrection in Nain was happening, John the Baptist, the greatest prophet now on the face of the earth—in some ways the last of the prophets of the Old Testament as he kind of marks the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New—is in prison! Now that's where our story picks up. John had disciples, too. He was training a group of people who would be advance men just like him, who would be Jesus' talkers. And they told him things that were going on. *"He sent two of his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the Coming One or should we wait for someone else?'"* (2) And so those men found Jesus and asked him that question.

Now I've got to stop it right here. Doesn't that sound a little odd? What was John the Baptist's job? His job was to tell the world that the Messiah, the Son of God, was now here. The kingdom of God was taking a gigantic leap forward in its development and advancement. There are two, only two, possible explanations for what John asked about. One is that this is an exercise to help two brothers whose faith was getting wobbly. And he said, "Well, I could be talking to you but right now with me being in jail, it's maybe a little bit of a stretch for you to believe that the King is here so go talk to Jesus himself, go talk to him." Or, maybe John himself was getting wobbly. And I'm going to put my quarter on option B and we'll find out when we get to heaven. Frankly, you can believe either one. God does not insist on picking one or the other. I think that if it was me, if I was John the Baptist and I was off to a terrific start in my ministry, even though I had tough things to say and the big crowds would come out and it looked like I was doing great things—of course, he was—but then to be arrested after about a year and a half I'd think, "Man, I'm just getting warmed up here! You can't put me in prison now. I'm herald of the King!" And does God sometimes do jailbreaks? Yeah! Luke, who wrote about this in his book of Acts, describes two of these jailbreaks—not one, but two! Peter busted out of jail with angelic intervention and so did Paul. How come John the Baptist stayed in the slammer and those two guys got out? Day after day, it would wear down my cheerful attitude if I were John—not only do I want to be about my ministry, imagine people treating the ambassador of the King with such disrespect. What would you imagine would happen to relations between the United States and Iran if we took Iran's ambassador and put him in a prison somewhere in Washington D.C.? That would be enough almost to drive two nations to war. So John is in prison thinking, "Where are you, God?" And I frankly could understand it if his faith was being shaken. God was allowing him to be put to the test. And for that matter, I think his faith was shaken all the way to the point when his execution order was given.

Does God sometimes do miraculous rescues for people who are about to suffer capital punishment? You bet! Remember Daniel, the old guy in the lion's den, eighty-five years old, bound and thrown into a pit of lions? Thought he'd be dead before he hit the ground and ended up simply spending an uncomfortable night with a bunch of panting beasts. Remember Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who thought they might just well be roasted to a crisp one day and gave their final confession and were thrown into the fiery furnace and to their great surprise, found out that they were better than asbestos—God made them flame proof until they got out? John the Baptist was probably thinking, "Any day now I'm going to have my rescue." But after the days wore on—and when he does his death walk, what do you suppose he's thinking? I don't mind the concept for a minute that his own faith was shaken. Jesus hears this question and whether it's the faith of these two disciples that is a little shaky or whether it's John's faith that's shaky it doesn't matter; somebody's faith is shaky here. *"Jesus answered them, 'Go report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the gospel is preached to the poor'"* (4-5).

In other words, not only hear my talk, but look at my track record. *"The blind receive sight."* Who but God could take someone at molecular level and rearrange what's wrong, whether it was retinal detachment or something wrong with the optic nerve or whatever it was, maybe the cornea's so clouded over no light would penetrate. He could simply reach right in and rearrange the molecular structure of people's eyeballs. Hello? *"The lame walk."* Whatever it might be, shriveling, atrophied limbs, someone with badly torn tendons or ligaments that never healed right and they're lame and can't walk, and God just mentally does surgery on

people and instantaneous convalescence. Who but the power of God could do that? *“Those who have leprosy are cured.”* He takes people not only who are sick, but shamefully sick. Leprosy banishes you, makes you feel like a loser and an outcast. You not only lose your health, you lose your friends. Even your family won’t touch you. No one will hug you anymore. You’ve kissed your last kiss. No one wants to be with you. You’re shunned. It’s like being the living dead; it’s like being a zombie almost. Lepers are cured. *“The deaf hear.”* People living in a world of silence hear music and laughter again. What do you think is happening here? *“The dead are raised, and the gospel is preached to the poor.”* He saved the best for last. This is a little echo of his beatitudes, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”* This doesn’t mean that there’s good news to people who are no longer going to have their houses go into foreclosure or God is going to cancel all bankruptcy proceedings. When Jesus says, *“the gospel to the poor,”* he’s quoting Isaiah and this means poor in spirit. He’s bringing good news of release to people who have a death sentence and divine condemnation hanging over them. Just as you, by birth, have a death sentence hanging over you—the big letter “L” is branded on your forehead—condemned, dying, you’re the living dead, waiting for the execution to be carried out. And Jesus came to bring release to captives, forgiveness and pardon to the guilty.

Imagine John in prison and he sends his representatives to Jesus to find out what’s happening to the plan. Jesus finished his statement to John’s disciples with a very important verse. In verse 6 he said: *“Blessed is the one who does not take offense at me.”* In other words, that you don’t lose confidence and lose hope and lose faith by looking at the humble way, the slave way, the servant way, in which Jesus was carrying out his rescue ministry. *“Blessed is the one who does not take offense at me.”* John has a death sentence hanging over his head. He’s going to be taking that long slow walk to the execution block where his head is going to be separated from his shoulders. *“Blessed is the one who does not take offense at me.”*

Jesus, himself, did not look like the type of rescuer that John himself perhaps had expected and certainly many of the other people had expected, as well. He looked like an ordinary traveling rabbi. He looked so ordinary that the people from his hometown thought he was having delusions of grandeur because he was thinking that he was something special, not just one of the kids who had grown up in Nazareth. You know, I think you and I probably find this pretty easy to resonate with John. We wonder, too, where is our God? We also chaff at the burdens we have to bear and the struggles that we have. How has your family done financially? There have been people who have gone into bankruptcy. There are people who have lost their homes. This has been a hard time for some people.

“Lord, where are you? Why don’t you more evidently and obviously come and show your power?” Jesus’ words are so important: *“Go, report to John what you hear and see.”* He has not come to fix everything now; he came to do demos to show what he is going to do and to authenticate his message of forgiveness, pardon and peace. The work that Jesus did to rescue you and me was not done in a blaze of glory or by spreading wealth around to his followers. The work that Jesus did was to allow sinful men to beat him bloody, hang him on a cross and in this way make the ultimate payment so that your relationship with your God will be a good one. Because of what he did as an innocent substitute, a sacrifice for the sins of the world, the Father now looks on you and me as his children; loved and forgiven forever. And to back up that message he showed the healing that he will bring. But in the meantime, *“Blessed is the one who does not take offense at me.”*

So what? Let’s bundle this all together. My hope is that you do not fall away because you, like John the Baptist, or like some of the people Jesus encountered, struggle, too. And some days you just don’t feel loved and blessed because your life is hard. Sometimes God intervenes with human assistance or miraculous assistance and sometimes he doesn’t. Some blind people were given their sight back. Even today, some people have remarkable recovery of eye sight and some die blind. Do you trust that God has a plan in the way he’s managing things? Blessed are those who don’t take offense at the way in which he goes about doing his business.

Isn’t it hard to praise God when your credit card debt just keeps mounting? When you’ve been unemployed for twenty-four months it’s hard to say: “My God takes care of my every need,” isn’t it? When someone you love gets sicker and sicker and according to your actuarial tables that person is too young to die and you see that person slipping away and you pray for a miracle and the miracle doesn’t happen, that’s hard, isn’t it? It’s hard to say: “God, you’re doing all things well.”

Watch him in action because what he did not promise is to put heaven on this earth. What he did promise is to bring good news to people who struggle, people who are poor; poor in body, poor in wallet, poor in spirit, poor in sins. And by his demonstrations and then even more so by his substitutionary life and death, he has bought forgiveness for everyone, you and me and the world. And he gave us a demo of what he's going to do for everybody. It's not that he loves some people more than others. He's giving you a demo of what he's going to do on a grand scale. Only a few people had their funerals reversed. But when the Lord Jesus returns, the graves are going to blow open and everyone you have buried with tears will burst forth into new life. Jesus said, "*Whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*" And I need you to believe that for now. You'll see it soon, but I need you to believe it now.

God also doesn't want you to be offended by the subtlety with which he works because one thing I've noticed both in Scripture and in my own personal life, God prefers to do miracles kind of as his last resort. He much prefers first for you to take care of yourself. So when you pray, "*Give me my daily bread,*" you don't sit in your big old Barcalounger with ESPN on waiting for a sandwich to come floating in from the kitchen when you say, "Man, I'm hungry. Give me today my daily bread" and you hold up your hand to catch the ham and cheese sandwich that will come flying through. When God hears you over and over saying, "Give me today my daily bread" he will arrange a job opportunity for you. Do it! Take care of your business. Sometimes when you're challenged with something bigger than you he will answer your prayer but not always with a miracle, at least not one that you can detect. He will send you people because he really loves having people taking care of people. Sometimes he does intervene with miracles. Never ever hold back when you are out of options for praying for everything, praying for the sun and moon and stars. Pray for it all for the God you worship is capable of everything. There's nothing too big for him to do.

And some of you have some incredible stories; I've got a few myself. I don't want to embarrass anyone but I have seen incredible human turnarounds and perhaps you have, too. Tell each other those stories! And call upon God to have his way with us to carry out his divine will to lift us up. But what cannot be doubted is that he came once and comes now and will come again because he likes us. What cannot be doubted is that he's here to help, that he cares in his heart and he motivates and puts into motion the resources of heaven and earth to meet our needs and what he thinks we really need. He is there for us now and will be there for us always.

Best of all, when that grand trumpet goes off you and I are going to see happening what happened to the young man of Nain. You're going to see people you thought were gone forever come bursting back to life and you also will receive the ultimate healing. When everything broken in your body gets put back together and everything worn out or missing gets restored. You will undergo a complete personal overhaul and glorification. This is what we look forward to. This is what Dr. Jesus promises to do for you now. And I'm not even mentioning when I said he's sending people, imagine all the people in the healthcare industry who are working for you as God's hands and fingers: the lab techs and the researchers and the nurses and the oncologists and the surgeons and the general practitioner doctors and all the other people who are together in a mighty army. They are all doing God's work of healing and he puts his love through them and touches your life with it.

"*Blessed are those who do not take offense at me.*" Jesus told that to John's disciples so they could give him encouragement in prison. Jesus might have very well said the same things to you and to me, as well. "You are blessed if you don't fall away on account of the humility you see in my life and if you don't fall away because of the struggles I allow you to have in your life. Watch what I do; tell people what you see me do, how I made a funeral stop and reversed it and gave life back to a corpse. I have come to do that for you and all who trust and believe in me will wake up to see me smiling at them. This is good news for God's people! But also go and tell John what you've seen and heard, what I do to patch up people. I gave demos of my powerful ability to help people in their time of waiting and time of serving in their earthly lives."

Look at what he did to give people their mobility and health and strength back and realize that in ways that he chooses and at the times that he chooses; he still brings healing to you and to me. "*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases.*" This is an awesome benefit package. Whether he gives the healing through prayer where he just intervenes with a miracle or he uses medical professionals to bring healing to me. "*Forget not all his benefits.*"

Lord, your word promises us that when we trust in you we receive a benefit plan that is truly out of this world. *“Forget not all his benefits, O my soul.”* Lord, we praise you that you forgive all our sins. You are the healer of our diseases. Help us to trust and believe in you more strongly than ever. Help us to place our true treasures in heaven with you. We pray this, Lord Jesus, in your holy name, Amen.