

Part 7: Health

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I'd like us to turn to Genesis chapter 2 and verse 7. We will be coming back to Mark Chapter 5 throughout the sermon, but let me read Genesis 2, 7 as we begin.

Then the Lord God formed the man of the dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. Tonight we are continuing what has been our morning series. This week I wanted to switch it to this evening just to tie in with when I go to camp in a couple of weeks' time so that we can finish the series next week. Our series is called Good Dreams, Better Certainties, and in this series we're highlighting two great truths. One, the fact that everybody has dreams.

So whoever you are, whatever stage in life you're at, there's things that we dream of, things that we long for, and these dreams are good. They give us joy, purpose, direction, and it's wonderful when these dreams come through in our lives. Everyone has dreams and those dreams are good. The second big thing that we're highlighting though is that the gospel gives you certainties, and these certainties are even better. And I've said this every week, but I'll keep saying it. Dreams are maybes, they're possibilities, they're hopes, and sometimes they come through, sometimes they don't, sometimes they come through and they're not as good as we imagined. The gospel gives us promises, and these promises are certain, they are guaranteed, they are unlosable. And not only that, the content of those promises is way bigger and way better than even our very best dreams. So everyone has dreams, and dreams are good. The gospel offers you certainties, and those certainties are even better. And each week we've taken our text from Genesis 1 and 2, and the reason we're doing that is because we want to show that our dreams, the things that people dream about in life, actually find their origin and their explanation in the creation narrative of Genesis 1 and 2. And so the things that we dream of, and even the things that the people around us dream of, even if they don't believe in God, and don't read the Bible, and have no interest in church, their dreams still find their origin in the Bible. And without the Bible, without the gospel, our dreams don't make sense. And the important consequence of that that we've highlighted every week is the fact that if you want to know whether or not the gospel has got anything to offer you, if you want to know whether or not Jesus has any relevance in your life, you don't need to think about philosophy, you don't need to think about big religious convictions, you need to think about your dreams. And we've been looking together at eight dreams that people have, and we're nearly finished. So we've done home, career, relationship, family, sport, and wealth, and tonight we are looking at the dream of health. And for all of our dreams, we're saying the same three things. These dreams are good dreams. These dreams are broken dreams, and the gospel replaces these dreams with better certainties. So thinking about the dream of health, first of all, we want to say that this is a good dream. In Genesis 2-7, we read that the Lord breathed into the man's nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. Now that word creature is an important word. It's the Hebrew word nefesh, which is a word that can also mean soul. It's very often translated soul. Sometimes it's translated life. It can be the idea of being. And it's highlighting for us that you've got the man's body, but then a soul is breathed into him. And humanity is that unity of the physical and spiritual body and soul. And that unity of body and mind is created to thrive. In other words, we're created to be healthy. That living creature that God created there, the first human, is created to be healthy. And in so many ways, the environment that God places him in the Garden of Eden is a wonderfully healthy environment. There's healthy relationships between Adam and Eve, between humanity and the animal kingdom and the created world around him. There's healthy resources provided. There's healthy lifestyle. There's healthy people. And it's all reinforcing the fact that the dream of health is a good dream. And our whole society agrees. So whether it's in terms of healthy food or exercise or work-life balance or personal care or supplements, vitamins, that kind of thing, there's a huge

amount of attention given in our society to the dream of good health. And all the way from the NHS to your gym subscription to the kind of health supplements that are a massive part of the economy now, it's all part of this dream of health. Some people might think about this an awful lot. Other people might not think about it very much. But it's a dream that actually, I'm sure, we all share. We all want to be healthy. And in many ways, several of our other dreams also depend on health. So a career, sport, family, all these things depend on good health. And so we're being reminded as we start that in Genesis 2, humanity is created with enormous potential. And in lots of ways, good health is key to that potential being realised.

So the dream of health is a good dream. And I think we can actually break that down further into three distinct parts. First is the dream of staying well. So we want to remain healthy in our lives. So we want to be healthy in our bodies. So we want to feel good. We want to avoid pain. We want to maintain good mobility. We want to prevent illness. And even something like our teeth. You go to the dentist and it's such a relief when they say, everything's fine. And you can just go home and avoid that awful place for another year.

[6 : 36] We want to stay healthy in our bodies. We also want to stay healthy in our minds. So we want to avoid stress. We want to feel secure. We want to have good self-esteem. We want to reduce anxiety. And everybody is trying to find that balance, or certainly should be trying to find that balance that maintains and preserves our physical and mental health. So there's the dream of staying well.

Secondly, there's the dream of reaching your prime in terms of your health. Now, not everybody has that dream, but many people do. People want to be as fit and as healthy as possible. And that might actually have a very big influence on your weekly routine. It might not, but it has a big influence on lots of people's routine. There are many people for whom this week their exercise, their diet, their sleep pattern, their work-life balance is all going to be directed towards making themselves as healthy as possible. And there's lots of ways and lots of reasons why that's a good thing to do. And the same applies not just to our physical health, also to our mental health. We want to be calm and confident and capable. We want to cope well with life. And again, that's a good dream to have. So there's the dream of staying well. There's the dream of reaching your prime. But I think for many people, it's the third part of the dream of health that you long for more than anything.

The dream of getting better. And that's a dream that you find in the Bible. A great example of it is in 2 Kings chapter 20.

Hezekiah is the king of Judah. He became sick and was at the point of death. Isaiah the prophet came to him and said, thus says the Lord, set your house in order because you're going to die. You're not going to recover. And Hezekiah turns his face to the wall and prays to the Lord saying, Lord, please remember how I've walked before you in faithfulness with a whole heart and have done what's good in your sight. He wept bitterly. And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him, turn back and say to Hezekiah, the leader of my people, thus says the Lord, I've heard your prayer. I've seen your tears. I will heal you. For Hezekiah, there was the dream of getting better. And you see it in the Gospels.

there's a blind man calling out to Jesus and they take him to him. And Jesus says, what do you want me to do for you? And the blind man said, I want to recover my sight. And at the pool of Bethesda in John 5, Jesus says to him, do you want to be healed? And he's like, yes, but nobody will take me into the pool in time, so I can't get better. For many people in the Bible, the dream of health was the dream of getting better. And for so many of you here today, either here or watching at home, for so many people in our community, for so many people across our nation, that is the dream. And it's a dream that can apply to ourselves. So maybe, you know, your own health is a big challenge. Or maybe it's somebody you love who is unwell. And the dream is that one day there'll be better. And that's why everybody, you know, everybody in our community, in our nation will agree that when you talk about being unwell, you know, the idea of being discharged or hearing the doctor say, your scans are all clear. That's the dream.

[10 : 02] And when that happens, it's such a relief and such a joy to so many people. So health is a wonderful blessing. It's incredibly precious. And of course, that's reminding us that it's something we should never, ever take for granted. It's something that we want to value. And it's something that we want to thank God for every day. And it's really important to say this is maybe just a slight tangent, but health is a great example of, you know, just something to thank God for every day. To thank God to say, Lord, I'm so thankful that I can walk. I'm so thankful that I'm mobile. I'm so

thankful that I'm feeling well. You know, if that's the case, if you are feeling well, so, so important to thank God for that. Connected to this again, I don't say this very often. I've been wanting to say this for a long time. This is also an example of why, you know, giving thanks to God before our meals is so important. We'd be dead without food. And so thanking the Lord for our food before we eat is such a good habit. Health is a precious, precious gift. The dream of good health is a good dream.

It's also a broken dream. And you see that very, very clearly in the Bible. Sin comes into the world and disease and suffering and death enters our experience.

And so in Genesis 2, humanity is a living creature. By the end of Genesis 3, humanity is a dying creature. And we see the reality of that all around us. We see the reality of it in our own lives as well.

And there's two aspects of this broken dream I want to think about. The first is obvious. There's the brokenness of bad health. And there are many, many examples of this in Scripture. And there are many of you who live with the reality of this every day. We read from Mark 5. And I think that passage is, it's one of many passages that we could have looked at. But Mark 5, I think, is fascinating. And it's very, very insightful because it reveals just the extent of how the dream of health has been broken.

There's the obvious reality of physical suffering. There's a woman who'd had a discharge of blood for 12 years. And so she's had a chronic illness for a long, long time. She has been unwell year after a year. And that has caused suffering for her. And then there's the fact that she suffered both in her illness, suffered in her treatment, and she's deteriorating. So rather than getting better, it's getting worse. And like any illness, it's not just the illness itself, but there's a knock-on effect of that illness. So for this woman, that kind of discharge would have meant that she wouldn't have been able to conceive a child. And it's very, very likely that a condition like that would have brought on fatigue and pain and other complications. And that's a reality for a whole host of different physical conditions. And so many of you, so many of you know what that's like. So many of you have experienced illness in your lives, and some of you have chronic illness that you've had for years, and that's probably not going to go away. Many of you live with pain every day. And I think many of you are very, very good at masking that. But many people would just live with daily pain.

[13 : 48] Fatigue is another massive issue that many, many people struggle with. And that can be so debilitating, so frustrating, so difficult. There's additional complications like this woman had, where the same one aspect of her health has a knock-on effect that just makes things more complicated and more difficult. This woman had invasive treatment that was painful and difficult and daunting. And for her, it was ineffective. Thankfully for us, many, many times our treatment will be effective, but it can still be pretty hard. And for this woman, her quality of life was reduced. I'm sure she would have been looking at other women thinking, why couldn't I just be like them? And I'm sure there's many of you who feel like that too. And you struggle with the reality of physical illness, and you can see others, or even see a time in your own life when you didn't have that. You think, oh, I wish it was like that. But there's more than just the physical suffering.

Alongside that, there was the social stigma of being unwell. Now, for this woman, this would have been an awkward condition to have, and in many ways it would be humiliating for her, because it wouldn't have been an easy condition to hide. And then there's the added complication that in this context, in a first century Jewish society, she's ceremonially unclean because of her bleeding. And that makes it much harder for her to participate, not just in the religious life of the community, but any aspect of the life of the community people would want to keep away from her. And she also would not have been able to fulfill the social expectations of a woman in that society.

If you're a woman in that society, you're meant to get married, you're meant to have kids, you're meant to be a mum. And she couldn't do any of that. And so there's this massive social impact of her illness as well. And our social pressures today are very different from hers, but the same problems and same principles apply. So we might be physically unwell, but maybe our biggest struggle is that we just feel so self-conscious of the fact that we're ill, that we're not right in terms of our health. That might be because of the effect it has on our appearance, it might be the effect on our mobility, or maybe it's just the fact that we're just scared that people are talking about us. And this is one of the maybe unique challenges in the island.

I think the healthcare professionals here are absolutely amazing at maintaining confidentiality, but you can be walking to the doctors and you can meet half your friends on the way, or you can be sitting in the waiting room and there's people you know sitting opposite you.

[16:37] All of it just adds to a social awkwardness and difficulty. And we don't have the same pressure to be ceremonially clean, but I think that we do have a pressure to present ourselves as kind of socially clean and sorted and capable all the time. We want to come across as though everything's fine. Which is why whenever anybody asks us, how are you, what do we say? Fine. No matter how bad we might be, that's always our answer. And so just like there's pressures on this woman in Mark 5, we feel the same thing. And when we're struggling with our health, it's very easy to feel a huge sense of failure. And all of that combines to bring a deep personal distress when we're ill. So for this woman, she had suffered for a long, long time. It had consumed her life, it had left her destitute, and she had longed to get better. But nothing that she had tried had worked.

And in Mark 5, the narrative, one of the things the narrative seems to indicate is that she was trying to just blend into the background. You know, she wanted to be able to just touch Jesus and disappear and not be noticed. She wanted to stay hidden. And I think that's reminding us that that being ill can be such a lonely experience. You feel vulnerable. You feel anxious. You feel isolated. And there's a sense of grief about the good health that you feel like you've lost.

There's a sense of fear about whether or not anything's actually going to get better at all. At the same time, you feel like you're a nuisance. You feel like you're letting people down.

You feel like you're being a burden. And all of this is showing how our physical and our mental health are intertwined. Physical and mental health have a profound effect on each other.

And this is just reminding us, I guess, to sum all of this up, the fact that so many of you, I have seen, and I want to say this very clearly, I've seen so many of you being so incredibly brave and patient and courageous in the face of illness. But alongside that, there is no doubt that being ill is a huge source of sadness. For the people themselves who are ill and for the people who are around us, whether it's our physical health or our mental health, being ill is rubbish.

[19:20] And it's really interesting that the word that's used here later on to describe the woman's disease, that's a word that's often translated disease, but it's also a word that can mean a whip or a scourging, like a kind of whip that's repeatedly used. And I think that's really quite powerful. It's like when you're ill, it is just as though your illness day by day is just beating you down again and again and again. And then with Jairus' daughter, we actually see even more. Because here you see the utter mercilessness of illness. You've got a young girl, she's 12 and she's dying.

And that's just such a powerful example of how cruel and merciless sin is. And as this girl is just at the point of death, you see that illness brings anguish to a whole family as her father falls before Jesus, begging him for help. And all of you know how that feels.

You know, not everybody here has been unwell, but everybody here, I think, has had someone they love who's been unwell. And it's just emphasizing just how much damage sin has caused.

And there's the brokenness of bad health. And that causes huge, huge pain.

But I want to also briefly say that alongside the brokenness of bad health, it's important to recognize the brokenness of good health as well.

[21:19] And what I mean by that is the fact that our dream of good health, while it's a good dream, it can also be dangerous. And it's dangerous in a couple of ways. First, there's the danger of anxiety. And so even when our health is good, it's so easy to be overwhelmed with anxiety about the risk of the what if. And that might apply to ourselves. We're anxious about infection. We're anxious about injury. We're anxious about a fall. We're anxious about lots of things. And the what if can be crippling. But it can also be anxiety about other people. So it can be anxiety about our children, or about a spouse, or perhaps about elderly parents. There's huge fear about what might happen. And that can arise when, that can often arise maybe when we've been ill and maybe got better. But there's a huge fear that something bad is going to happen again.

And that need to protect our health can become all-consuming. And you see that in the woman, she was trying to recover, but it consumed everything that she had. She'd spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. And that same thing can happen to us. Fear about our health can become the dominant influence in our lives. And if it does, it'll always come at a cost.

Maybe it'll cost us financially, as we, you know, pour ourselves into a lifestyle and a routine that we hope will keep us well. Maybe it'll cost us relationally, where we actually obsess over this so much, we push other people away. And maybe it'll cost us in terms of missed opportunities, because we're just afraid that something might happen. So we just decide to stay still and avoid taking the opportunities that come before us. And what can happen, and what happens to many people, is that they find themselves in a situation whereby anxiety about their good health is actually ruining their

health.

And that's a very clear example of the brokenness of good health. Even more seriously, though, in terms of our health is the danger of idolatry. Our health can very easily become an idol. And what do I mean by that?

Well, an idol is something that you become completely devoted to, and something that everything else has to bow down to has to bow down to, and obey. And it's very easy for our health to fall into that category. We see health as the answer to everything.

[23 : 58] So if we're ill, we think that getting better is everything. And if we're healthy, we think that staying healthy is everything.

And of course, it's important, absolutely. But it's easy for something that's very, very important to become the ultimate thing that we live for. And when that happens, it controls our lives. Our diet, our exercise routine, our approach to hygiene, our aversion to risk, these can have a massive, massive influence over what we do and don't do.

And it can affect how you live this week, and affect how I live this week. And sometimes it can be imprisoning over our lives.

And so it's often the case that good health becomes a very broken dream. And that happens when it becomes an idol that we will sacrifice ourselves to.

Why does that happen? Why is health so powerful in our lives? If you look at the health industry today, it is a multi, multi-billion dollar industry.

[25 : 17] And it has a massive effect on the lifestyle of our society and of ourselves. Why is it so powerful? Why are we so anxious about our health?

Why will we allow our health to be an idol that controls us and that maybe even consumes us? Why is health so influential and so powerful?

Well, the answer is actually very easy and simple. It's because we're scared of dying. And that is precisely where the gospel replaces this dream with a better certainty.

In fact, the gospel gives you everything that you are longing for. And Mark 5 is so helpful for us because this chapter is an example of something that we see again and again in the gospels.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are all introducing us to Jesus. They are showing us the things that he said and the things that he did. They're revealing his identity and they're revealing to us why he came.

[26 : 39] And one of the things that the gospels will tell us again and again and again or will show us again and again and again is that Jesus has come to reverse the effect of sin.

Sin has brought a devastating curse onto humanity. It has brought disease and pain and anxiety and distress and injury and death.

Sin has brought humanity under its grip and the kingdom of evil has got one clear goal. It's to destroy everything good that God has made.

And that includes us. But the message of the gospels of the Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and the message of the whole of scripture is that the kingdom of God has come.

And the king of that kingdom, Jesus, is going to undo all the damage that sin has caused. Jesus has come to reverse the effects of the fall.

[27 : 39] And all of his miracles are evidence of that. That's the purpose of the miracles, to show that Jesus is reversing the effect of the curse. Every miracle was to do with a situation that had been caused by the curse, whether it was illness or death or oppression by evil spirits or danger in terms of the created environment, storms and the like.

That's all because of the curse. Every miracle is to show that Jesus has come to reverse that. And Mark 5 is an amazing example of this. This woman has been suffering for so, so long.

She finally comes to Jesus. She just touches the edge of his garment. And she's healed. And I sort of wish that Mark had said more.

Like, she touched his garment and she felt in her body that she was healed. I wish we knew more of just how she knew that.

But instantly, she was aware that she was better. The pain, the suffering, the isolation, the shame is all undone. And then with Jairus' daughter, there is even more.

[29 : 00] Her illness has actually reached the goal of the kingdom of evil. It's consumed her. She's dead. Her life has ended. Her family are devastated.

And death has defeated yet another human life. And tragically early, at only 12 years old, Jesus comes along and he says, Up you get.

And that little girl who's died gets up and is well again. And all of it is such a magnificent demonstration of what Jesus has come to do.

He's come to reverse the curse of sin. And in terms of the dream of health, what we need to recognize is that the dream we have of health actually finds its ultimate and complete and perfect fulfillment in Jesus.

Because Jesus comes with the promise of eternal life. For all who believe in him, there's the promise of eternal life. And part of the promise of eternal life is the promise of eternal health.

[30 : 09] And that's such an important thing to think about. And the Bible speaks about it incredibly powerfully. Let me show you Revelation chapter 21. These verses describe the end goal of redemptive history.

Look out for the language of health. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be his people. And they will be his people. And God himself will be with them as their God. And he will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore. For the former things have passed away.

How much mourning and crying and pain and tears have been caused by the brokenness of our health.

[31 : 12] And the promise of the gospel is that in eternity all of that will be gone. And if you are a Christian or if you become one, this is what awaits you in eternity.

And that means that you will be physically restored forever. So everything that is sore now. And everything that is broken now.

And everything that is getting old now. And everything that is getting weaker now. Is going to be restored. Your body is going to be healthy. And strong.

And agile. And good. And your eternal health is also going to mean that mentally and emotionally you are going to be settled.

And you are going to be happy. And you are going to be at peace. Forever. No more stress. No more anxiety.

[32 : 17] No more crushingly low self-esteem. No more fear of what people are saying. No more feeling like a failure. All of that is gone.

And that means that the gospel is offering you everything that you dream of in terms of health. Except it's better. And it's forever.

And one of the reasons why health is a dream for us is because it's elusive. It's slipping away. And like every other dream, even if we have it, we only ever have it temporarily. And it's literally Jesus replaces all our dreams of health with something better.

With something forever. Pain. Gone. So pain. Gone. Tears.

Gone. Gone. I love the description of verse 4. I've said this before. But I love the description of verse 4. That God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

[33 : 26] It's a great reminder that you can arrive at heaven with tears. They'll be wiped away as you enter. Grief. Gone. Crying.

Gone. Death. Gone. Gone. And it is absolutely crucial for all of us to realize that this is the level that the gospel operates at.

This is what Christianity is all about. The gospel is a message of eternal life, eternal healing, eternal restoration. If you don't want that, the gospel's got nothing for you.

If you think the gospel is less than that, then you don't understand the gospel. But if you want that, then the gospel has got everything that you long for.

Now, as we conclude, I want to say, just in conclusion, that there's two crucial things to remember here. In terms of the dream of health, there's one thing that you don't need, and there's one thing that you do need.

[34 : 37] What don't you need, you don't need to get better now. And that's so important to remember, because when we look at passages like Mark 5 and we see someone being healed, and

then we think, that's not happening to me.

Why is it not happening to me? And the reason it's not happening to you is because it only ever functioned in Mark 5 to be a sign pointing towards something bigger. And even for that woman, she would have got unwell again and passed away when her time came.

And healing just now may happen, it's only ever temporary. The medical advancements that image bearers of God have made to help us, these are wonderful, but again, they're just temporary, they're just signs.

It's so important to remember that there's always going to be a moment in this life when we don't get better. Because you don't need to. You don't need to get better now.

You never need to get better now. Because the permanent healing, the full restoration, the eternal physical and mental health and flourishing that God promises does not come in this life.

[35 : 45] It comes in a new creation. It comes in eternity. So please don't worry if you don't get better now. Some of you will, and that's amazing.

And sometimes we do see wonderful healings. That is amazing. But sometimes it doesn't happen. And it's okay if you don't get better. It's okay if you know that you're not going to get better. Because if you're a Christian or if you become one, deterioration is only ever for a wee while. And perfect health is forever.

So you don't need to get better now. There is one thing that you absolutely must do, though. And that's revealed to us in Mark 5. And it's so simple.

You need to trust Jesus. And that's emphasized that, you know, Jesus speaks about the woman's actions as a step of faith.

[36 : 45] When the visitors, when the people came from Jairus' house to tell him that she died, Jesus said, Don't fear, only believe. One at a time, as always. I just want to say very, very quickly, you have to notice the contrast.

What Jesus does for this woman is massive. He heals 12 years of chronic, debilitating, horrendous illness. What Jesus does for Jairus is massive.

He raises a precious daughter from the dead. It's massive. What did the woman and Jairus do? Almost nothing. The woman just touched his garment and Jairus just said, Please help my daughter.

And Jesus said to them, All you've got to do is trust me. And that is all he asks of you.

What Jesus promises you is far, far more than you dreamt of. What Jesus asks of you is far, far less than you think.

[37 : 53] Amen. Let's pray. Let's pray.