

Blood Stained Pews Series / Sermon 4: Apathy June 26, 2022

“The Chosen” Clip

So, how many of you guys use WebMD? I found this article in “WebMD” from April of last year: Millennials Flock to Telehealth, Online Research. One big survey reports that 69% of millennials – those between the ages of 24 and 40 – 69% searched online for medical advice instead of going to a doctor. About 25% trust Google to diagnose their symptoms. 83% do their own research after talking to their doctor. And 42% trust their own research more than their doctor ... almost half.

Another survey says that 0.2% of all doctors recommend their patients use WebMD to diagnose and treat their ailments. Actually, I made that one up. But I’ll bet it’s not far off. I ran across this last week when I was studying for this sermon: “Please don’t confuse your Google search with my medical degree.” Because, Google and YouTube have turned us all into experts, right? My son-in-law, Tommy, is a family practice physician over in Lawrenceburg. He kind of puts your online medical research right up there with those medicine commercials that tell you to “ask your doctor about” ... whatever. In fact, I think he puts that stuff right up there with staying at a Holiday Inn Express.

Now, I know there is some value to those sites ... if they are used with extreme humility. But guys who study this stuff will tell you that they cause some serious problems, too.

- Because, the more you think you know, the less you trust those who probably know a whole lot more. And that can be a real problem.
- And whatever symptoms we are having usually point several different directions. And a lot of us ... we’ll just assume the worst. I was digging some post-holes and putting up some fencing last week. I got a little sick to my stomach, I got really sweaty, had some leg cramps, extreme fatigue, some back pain. When I googled the symptoms, those are all symptoms of a heart attack. I think I was having a heart attack! Of course, it could have been that it was in the 90s, and I’m fat, and old, and out of shape. But “heart attack” is more exotic, right?

- And when we do our Google research, sometimes we insist on tests that the doctor probably wouldn't have run, and put ourselves on meds the doctor probably wouldn't have prescribed, as we listen to "experts" the doctor probably wouldn't have consulted ... like that guy on Facebook whose neighbor had the same symptoms you have ... and died, right?

Well ... there words for people who ... misdiagnose their ailments. I'm not talking about words like dork, and twit, and wuss, although those work too, sometimes. I'm talking about actual medical words ... kind of. Here are three.

- Hypochondria. How many of you guys are hypochondriacs? I know some of you are! A hypochondriac is someone with an abnormal – abnormal -- anxiety about their health. Especially someone with an unwarranted fear that they have some serious disease. A hypochondriac can wear you out, right? They are always sick with something; often dying of something. And, if you happen to get sick, they've got it worse, right? Hypochondria: you think you're sick, even when you're not.
- The next word is not quite as real. Now it is in the dictionary ... if you count the urban dictionary ... it's kind of slang. It's called "hyper-chondria," the opposite of hypo-chondria. Not very good Greek, but it's fun! It's where people don't want to admit they're sick. Any of you guys like that, you hate admitting you're sick? According to the Urban Dictionary, hyperchondria is the "persistent conviction that one is never or is likely to never become ill, often involving blatant disregard for emergent symptoms, and persisting despite medical evidence to the contrary." How many of you guys like Monte Python and the Holy Grail? ____ Think the Black Knight. King Arthur cuts off his arm, and he says, "Tis but a scratch. I've had worse." King Arthur cuts off his leg, and he says, "It's just a flesh wound." Hyperchondria: you won't admit you're sick.
- One more ... and this one isn't in any dictionary. I just made this one up: "apachondria." I just took the word "apathy" and jammed it into chondria ... like the others. Apachondria: I don't know if I'm sick, and I don't care. If I discover that I am sick, I still don't care. Don't know, don't care. Probably couldn't do anything about it anyway, right? So why worry? I'd doing fine the way I am. So, why worry? Don't worry ... be happy ... right?

Guys, hypochondria, hyperchondria, apachondria: that stuff is bad enough when it comes to physical sickness. They are infinitely worse when it comes to spiritual sickness. Because, we're hybrids, right? There's a physical part of us, and spiritual part of us. And, as we all know, the physical part of us can get sick ... and die. And the spiritual part of us can, too ... get sick ... and die. And, guys, that is infinitely worse, right? Think about it:

- Spiritual hypochondria: Someone who has an abnormal, unwarranted anxiety about their spiritual health. They are always sick, they are always dying ... because they refuse to accept God's healing. They refuse to live out God's grace. Spiritual hypochondria can steal all your joy, right?
- And then, spiritual hyperchondria: Someone who refuses to admit they are sick, spiritually. I refuse to admit my sin. Or maybe I will admit I sin ... a little, but I'm way more good than bad, right? And my sins are not nearly as bad as his, or hers. Spiritual hyperchondria – refusing to admit you need some grace ... pride ... that can kill you, spiritually, right?
- And then, spiritual apachondria ... spiritual apathy. Don't know, don't care. Don't worry, be happy. I don't want to know ... if I am sick, spiritually. And if I discover that I am, I can live with it. Doing okay, just the way I am. Tried fixing it, some. It's just the way I am, now. And ... spiritual apathy can kill us ... right?

We're in this series we're calling "Blood Stained Pews." It's about being a church where the wounded, the bleeding, the spiritually sick find healing. We want this to be a place where we are finding healing ... because we all need it. And we want this to be a place where they will find healing ... no matter what uniform they wear out there. ... But ... listen ... if they are going to find healing in here, then we'd better be finding some healing in here. Because every one of us needs some healing, right? And we're starting out by trying to knock down some of the roadblocks that prevent our healing. Things like our pride. We dealt with that two weeks ago. Things like guilt and shame. We dealt with that last week. This week is about apathy. Do you care that you are spiritually sick? Do you really want to be well? Be honest!

In fact, let's pray that prayer again that we prayed a couple weeks ago. Read this prayer with me, and mean it, if you dare. Here it is, ready?

Search me, O God, and know my heart;

test me and know my anxious thoughts.
Point out anything in me that offends you,
and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

So, here goes. ... John chapter 5, verse 1. "Some time later," it says, sometime after the stuff that happened in chapter 4, "Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals." John doesn't tell us which festival it was: Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles? Probably because that doesn't really matter. Boatloads of Jews would pour into Jerusalem for their festivals ... and that's probably why Jesus was there.

Verses 2-3: "Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches." You see, Jerusalem was surrounded by these massive walls. And to get into the city you had to go through one of the gates. And apparently this "Sheep Gate" was the gate they'd use to bring in the sheep they'd use for the sacrifices in the temple. By the way. If I was going to take a dip in a pool, I'm not sure I'd pick the pool next to the sheep gate. Have you ever been around sheep? They stink, and they leave all these little raisins behind ... maybe some of them floating in that pool.

(John 5.4) But ... there was this ... "legend of the bubbles" ... which gave these sick guys a great reason to hang out there. You see, for some reason ... and there are a multiplicity of possible explanations ... for some reason the water in that pool would start bubbling, occasionally. And some of those guys believed the water was being touched by an angel, and that whoever dove in first would be healed from whatever ... whatever was crippling them ... kind of like holy water on steroids. By the way, I have some of that bubbly holy water in my office that you can have for 3 easy payments of \$49.95. ... That's humor.

Anyway, some of those who were really sick back then were really desperate. Those who were physically crippled ... I know, we're not supposed to use that word anymore. But back then there were no such sensitivities. No wheel chairs, no public accommodations for those with disabilities, no Social Security disability benefits, no Capable Ministry, no Wounded Warrior projects. And many of those with disabilities struggle with their bladder or their bowels, so in that world

they'd be particularly dirty and malodorous. And there were no "miracles of modern medicine" that would give them some ray of hope. Not only that, in that world, guys, most people connected sickness with sin. And if you were crippled, or disabled, there must have been some really big sin laying behind it somehow. Maybe Maybe they're just getting what they deserved, right? ... Dorks!

And along comes Jesus. And Jesus doesn't do what you might expect, what you might choreograph. I mean he's ... God, right. And he had the power to heal everybody there. Kind of like Oprah on steroids? ... "You get a healing. You get a healing! You get a healing!" But he doesn't do that. Jesus did heal people, occasionally ... to prove that he could. But he didn't go around looking for sick people to heal. He wasn't out crashing their hospitals and leprosariums. Because ... that wasn't why he was here. Because ... healing your body is not the most important thing Jesus can do for you. He didn't come to fix our broken world ... yet. That's still coming. He came to fix our broken souls ... if we'll let him. So Jesus narrows on this one guy to make two points, I think. 1: To show the crusty twerps who were watching him that healing a man on the Sabbath was God-honoring; and 2: To pose the question – the incredibly important question – "Do you want to get well?" Well, do you? Do you really? How badly do you want God to heal you?

So, here's what happens: verse 5-6 – "One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years." Guys, the typical lifespan back then was only about 40 years. He probably been sick his whole life. John says, "When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him this crazy question, 'Would you like to get well?'"

Seriously?! It sounds like a really stupid question, doesn't it? ... Till you actually think about it. Let me throw the question at you.

- Do you want your marriage to get well? Seriously? Enough to fundamentally change how you treat each other? Because if your marriage is sick, you're not doing it God's way, guys.
- Do you want your finances to get well? Seriously? Badly enough to cut up your credit cards and postpone getting those things you really, really want, now?

- Do you want your friendships to get well? Seriously? Badly enough that you would spend less time dissing people on social media and more time blessing people in person?
- Do you want your shame to get well? Seriously? Badly enough to set up some accountability for where you surf online? Badly enough to start filtering what you binge watch on TV?
- Do you want your relationships with your family, or your neighbors to get well? Really? Badly enough to quit harboring grudges, quit trying to get even, like God tells you to?
- Do you want your body to get well? Seriously? Badly enough that you will eat less and exercise more?

It's not a stupid question: Do you want to get well? I was reading one article that said that 80% of our health issues are caused by factors within our control ... 80%! We don't really want to get well ... that badly. We eat too much, drink too much, smoke too much, we don't exercise enough, and we don't handle our stress well. Do you really want to get well? And, when we are operated on, we go back to the same old behaviors that put us in the operating room in the first place. Do you want to get well more than you want your same old behaviors?

And, because I am a sarcastic twit, If I was that crippled guy, I might have answered Jesus ...

- Nah! I've only been sick 38 years. Vern's been sick for 40. I don't want him to out-sick me!
- Or, Do I want to get well? Nah! I just love hanging out here at the pool every day with all these sick people.
- Or, for the hyper-sensitive among us: Who are you calling sick? Are you labeling me, Jesus? I'm just differently abled ... right?
- Or, Do I want to get well? Nah. I love crawling around in my filth. Beats a desk job.

So ... what is Jesus doing? Because ... because Jesus doesn't ask stupid questions. What is Jesus really asking this guy? What is Jesus implying?

- Maybe he's asking, "Have you given up? Have you given up on trying?" I get it. The longer a problem lasts, the more discouraged we get, right?

- Or, maybe Jesus is like, “Have you given up on God?” Maybe you have prayed for God to help you, to heal you, over, and over, and over. And it’s like praying to an empty box, it seems, maybe. I know a whole lot of you probably think God is punishing you for some reason. Have you given up on God?
- Or, maybe Jesus is like, “Are you just going to keep on laying there, playing the victim?” “No one cares,” you’re thinking. “No one is willing to help,” you’re thinking. Because the longer a problem lasts, the more we tend to diss the people around us, right?
- Or, maybe Jesus is like, “Do you have any idea who I am? Are you willing to ... trust me?” Well, are you?

Well, here’s what the guy says. He says, “I can’t, sir, for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me.” (v 7) ... “I can’t. No one will help me.” “It’s not my fault ... no one will put me in.” “I can’t, I’m doing the best I can.” Would you call that apathy? Did you know that sometimes apathy is a defense mechanism? It’s a defense mechanism we use to protect ourselves from getting hurt. “I can’t!” “I don’t care anymore!” “What difference will it make?” “So what?” “I don’t give a crap.” “It doesn’t matter anymore.” “I give up!” ... Ever been there, felt that?

Guys, we are broken people living in a broken world, so we all have issues, right. We all battle all these spiritual diseases, these spiritual pandemics.

- Did you know that the longer a problem lasts, the more discouraged we become? Some of us have battled the same old problem – the same old sin, maybe – for months, for years, for decades. You’ve tried battling it ... kind of sort of. Maybe you’ve tried flat out hard, but nothing seems to work. You’ve discovered that your sin is simply stronger than you are. And you’re discouraged.
- And, did you know that the longer a problem lasts, the more excuses we tend to make? “No one will help me,” right? “I’ve tried behaving better, but she’s just a jerk!” “I’ve tried counseling ... didn’t work.” “I’ve tried praying ... didn’t work.” Excuses, rationalizations, justifications, blame.
- And, did you know that the longer a problem lasts, the more we tend to compensate, the more we learn to just live with it? It’s almost like it’s just ... our normal.

- We have some highly functional alcoholics in the room. You know your alcoholism is putting stress on your marriage, on your kids, on your joy ... but you've learned to live with it, right? ... Apathy?
- Some of you guys are in a functional, but terrible marriage. You've learned to accept it, the way it is. No real intimacy, no real partnership, no making each other better, no protecting each other. You're just staying together for the sake of the kids, or maybe for the sake of your God. Well ... do you want to get well? Really?
- Some of you guys are highly functional overspenders. You are quite proficient at living paycheck to paycheck, using your credit cards to pay your expenses, avoiding bill collectors. For some of you, that's because you can't get past the sin of ... greed. Do you want to get well?
- Some of you guys are highly functional porn addicts. You tell yourself, "It's not bad as adultery, right?" Well, go read Matthew 5 and see what Jesus has to say about that. You still value your spouse, you say. And you learn to cover your tracks, you hope. Do you really want to get well?
- And a whole lot of us are highly functional ... on the outside ... Jesus followers. We say we want the abundant life that Jesus promises ... life to the fullest. But we are more than willing to settle, when God's way proves hard. Apathy? ... Do you want to get well?

Did you know that we can't change what we are willing to tolerate? And ... did you know that we make it really tough on God to heal what we are willing to tolerate? Apathy is a roadblock to our healing, guys! You see, guys, listen: Every one of us is a sinner, and every sin we sin makes a mess. We hurt the people we're supposed to love on, and we push the God away we were created to love and serve. And we can't fix ourselves. We need help! We need healing! But we can't change, and we make it really tough on God to heal, what we are willing to tolerate. So, do you want to be well?

In the story ... the guy never answers Jesus! At least John doesn't record any answer, and John was there. Maybe there was this silence. Maybe Jesus wasn't listening to his words; maybe Jesus was listening to his heart ... because God can do that. Anyway, verses 8-9: Jesus told him, "Stand up, pick up your mat, and

walk!” (And) Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking! Because God can do stuff like that. Does that miracle seem ... wild to you? Do you think that really happened? Well, the bigger question is this: Do you believe in the possibility of a ... God? Because, guys, if there really is a God, a miracle like this is child’s play, right? Your healing is child’s play ... if you’ll quit fighting him. Jesus tells this guy, this guy who’d been crippled up his whole life: “Get up and walk.” And for some reason, he tries ... and he gets up ... and he walks.

By the way, what did this guy do to “earn” his healing? The answer is ... “Nothing.” It’s called grace. And we serve an infinitely powerful, infinitely smart, infinitely good, and infinitely loving God. And he can do stuff like this.

So, guys ... Do you want to be well? First of all, you have to admit you’re broken. And you also have to admit that you can’t fix you. Oh, I suppose there are some little things you can fix. But the most important stuff ...

- Are you lying to yourself about your faith? You tell other people you are mad at God, maybe, and you do a pretty good job proving your case, you think. ... Do you want to be well?
- Are you lying about your pride? You talk about the questions that keep you from Jesus, but you know deep down that the only thing keeping you from selling out to Jesus is that you simply want to be in charge. Do you want to be well?
- Are you lying to yourself about your guilt and your shame? Maybe you keep telling yourself you’re not that bad, better than most. You don’t need a Savior. Or maybe you keep telling yourself your sin is simply unforgiveable. You’ve sinned too big, or you’ve sinned too often. There has to be some limits to grace, right? Well, there’s not! Do you want to be well?
- How badly do you want some peace with God? How badly do you want some peace within? How badly do you want a taste of the life God meant for you ... for now, and for forever? Do you want to be well?

You see ... we call him, "The Great Physician" ... the perfect doctor for the soul. And if you are battling spiritual apathy, you need Jesus. You need real truth, you need real forgiveness, you need real grace.

- It starts, guys, with ruthless honesty. I confess my sin to my God. I own it: no excuses, no rationalizing, no blaming someone else. I confess "my" sin to God. And I'm not just confessing my sin, I'm confessing that I'm not strong enough, and I'm not smart enough, and I'm not good enough to fix myself. "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." I need grace.
- And then there's repentance. It's a change of mind, a change of direction. I'm not just asking God to forgive me, I'm asking God to help me look at my sin the way he looks at it. I don't like it there. I don't like what it's doing to me; I don't like what it does to you. "God, I want you to help me change. Not just words, I want you to help me change." That's repentance.
- And then, maybe the hardest of all: We accept the grace he promises. We trust his grace. We trust the awesomeness of our God.
- And then, guys ... give thanks. Thank God. Praise God. Grace is worth a little gratitude, right?

Invitation / To the LS ...

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