

# A Pre-Existing Condition

*Matthew 9:35-10:8 (9-23) | 6/18/2017*

If there are three words which can strike fear into someone's heart, it's probably these: "pre-existing medical condition." Have one, and you might not get health insurance, or your next job. It is certainly one of the central concerns of those of us wondering what changes might be made to Medicare. No matter what we might think about the Affordable Care Act or the attempts of the current administration to repeal and replace it, many of us with pre-existing conditions are concerned that we might incur greater "out of pocket" costs or even lose coverage. And while the problem may be very current, it's not new.

Consider the plight of William Cowie, who applied for a manufacturing job at a Rockwell International plant in Centralia, Illinois, in 1993. He was tested for the "likelihood" of developing a repetitive stress injury, and was denied employment. Mr. Cowie is one of several people suing over this.

Whatever we think of health insurance, HMOs and all of these complex issues, there's one thing that is clear. If you need help, and someone says you can't get it because of a pre-existing condition or that your insurance won't pick up the tab, you're in a bind. Up a creek.

The good news is that God's love covers all pre-existing conditions. No small print. No exclusions. No problems.

Human agencies will screen you out, cut you out, delete your file, reject your application or make you wait. They go by the numbers; God goes by the Book: "While we were yet sinners (suffering from a pre-existing condition), Christ died for us" (cf. Romans 5:8).

Jesus not only died for our pre-existing conditions; he lived with compassion in the presence of our suffering. The Gospel text today points to "The Great Physician" who feels only compassion for those who are experiencing medical challenges. And what was his response to all this? Was it to leave all this to the lawyers and judges? No. Dr. Jesus takes one look at the charts and delivers his instructions to the newly appointed disciple-doctors: "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment" (10:8).

God does not expect us to clean up our act before we can be worthy to approach him and receive his love, grace and forgiveness.

-You have a grief-broken heart because of the loss of a loved one? It's covered.

-You're a crack-head junkie? It's covered.

-You're manic-depressive and chemically dependent? It's covered.

-You're a sex addict, who can't get enough of pornography or prostitutes? It's covered.

-You have a gambling addiction or an alcohol addiction? It's covered.

-You're in an unfaithful relationship with someone who is not your spouse? It's covered.

-Perhaps you don't have major issues like these to deal with but your life feels empty. An empty life is covered too.

You might ask: "Are you telling me that if I come to God, God will solve all my problems?"

Well - yeah, sort of. God will work in partnership with you for healing and change; it may require some work on your part. But the work and effort come after receiving God's love and forgiveness. God does not reward us with his love because of our work.

Cleaning up our act is not a precondition for the love of God. God does not say to us, "If you would just do this or do that, then I could love you." All preexisting conditions are covered. Period.

Why is this important? Because we all know that being loved and accepted is half the battle.

Calvin Miller, in his book *An Owner's Manual for the Unfinished Soul* says that "we live in misery when we cannot master the art of that unconditional acceptance that God extends to us." Then he goes on to tell this fable:

Ethel had always had a long, long nose. In grade school the kids all called her "Beaky" until she ran into the restroom and cried. She was nearly 30 before Elmer (who had a fairly long nose himself) asked her to marry him. She said, "Yes, of course, I'll marry you, but what about my nose." "What nose?" asked Elmer. This was clearly the man for her.

She married Elmer, who loved her and never seemed to notice the length of her nose. But Ethel was not so gracious. Though her own nose had been fully accepted by Elmer, she had, over the years, begun to feel that Elmer's nose was just too long, and she didn't mind saying so. "It's too long, Elmer!" said Ethel, looking straight at Elmer's nose. "If you would just have it clipped, you'd be a good-looking man."

Elmer felt bad, but he trusted Ethel. Every time she said, "If you would just ...." she would tell him something that was good for him. Now she was telling him the plain truth. His nose was too long. He could see that ....

One of the first things Ethel said to him on their honeymoon was that he snored so loud she couldn't sleep. "If you would just have your adenoids out, I could be truly happy with you." So Elmer went to an E.N.T. surgeon and had his adenoids taken out. He quit snoring, but Ethel was not entirely happy.

When Elmer saw her looking at his neck mole, he could have said it before she did: "Elmer, if you would just have that mole taken off your neck ...." It wasn't much of a trick. It cost \$65 in outpatient charges. Presto: no more neck mole.

The same thing happened with Elmer's overlapping incisors. "Elmer, if you would just ...." "Oh, Ethel, of course," said Elmer, not letting her finish. An oral surgeon finished the task and Ethel was happy for a week or so, but soon Ethel pointed out that his tonsils were always infected and probably responsible for his halitosis. "Elmer, if you would just ...." So, of course, he did.

He was in the basement, meditating on whom he should call about the nose clip when Ethel made her way down the rickety steps and found him sitting in a dark corner. As her eyes fully adjusted to the low light, she saw a crude shelf with a sign over it. The sign said ELMER, IF YOU WOULD JUST .... A series of bottles sat on the shelf, labeled with dates and filled with clear solutions. Inside each of the bottles were things like moles and teeth and adenoids and tonsils. On the last bottle was written "nose tip," all ready to be dated when his surgery was over.

"Ethel ..." Elmer hesitated, "I was about to call a plastic surgeon." "Why Elmer, if you would just -" Ethel stopped and looked at the sign over the shelf. Suddenly she felt ashamed. She realized If-you-would-just was a terrible game. "Elmer, if you would just ..." she went on, "postpone that nose clip. I want to get mine clipped first." "But darling, I like your nose the way it is!" "Elmer, are you sure?"

He stood up and kissed her sweetly on the tip of her long proboscis. "Ethel, I know how to make our marriage perfect." "I do, too, Elmer, but go ahead and say it." "If you would just quit saying, 'If you would just ...'"

God doesn't play the If-you-would-just game. God says instead, "Just as you are, come." No matter the warts, moles, overlapping incisors, tonsils, adenoids and long proboscis. All pre-existing conditions covered. Period.

*Pastor Keith*