

36. The Gospel of John—5:1-15

“Rise, Take Up Your Bed and Walk!”

(7/15/18)

This morning in our study of John’s gospel we come to chapter 5—considered by many scholars to be one of the most, if not *the* most, important chapters in his entire gospel concerning the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although, it starts out with a curious story which gives rise to our first main point—

I. The Curious Narration—v.1-4

John 5:1 (NKJV)

¹ After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

As we studied last time in chapter 4, Jesus was up in the Galilee ministering when a certain nobleman pleaded with Him to heal his son who was gravely ill. (John 4:46-54)

Verse 1 of chapter 5 tells us He came back to Jerusalem for another one of the Jewish feasts—but which one we’re not told.

It was no doubt one of the three main feasts that every able-bodied Jew was required by law to attend who lived within 20 miles of Jerusalem.

Those feasts were: Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles.

John 5:2 (NKJV)

² Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches.

There were 10 gates around Jerusalem thru which a person could enter the city—one of them was the ‘Sheep Gate’. (Mentioned in Nehemiah 3:1 and 12:39)

It was called the Sheep Gate because it was through this gate that sheep were brought into the city to be sacrificed in the Temple.

Close to the Sheep Gate was a pool of water that was situated near the northeast corner of the Old City—it was called the “Pool of Bethesda”.

The Hebrew name **Bethesda** means “*house of mercy*.”

Excavations of the pool have revealed that it was actually two pools next to each other.

These pools had five porticoes—the dictionary defines a portico as: *a structure consisting of a roof supported by columns...usually attached to a building as a porch.*

These five covered porches had been built, no doubt, so that the sick and infirmed could keep out of the hot sun as they waited for the stirring of the waters in the hope of being healed.

These two pools and five porches contained a covered “deck” on each side and one across the middle.

Five speaks of the Pentateuch—the five books of the Law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

With one of the covered porches extending across the pool, the pool itself created a physical likeness to the stone tablets (Ten Commandments) Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai—thus, the pool portrayed a perfect picture of the Law.

The Law of Moses contained no mercy for guilty sinners only punishment—and yet this place was called the ‘house of mercy’—why?

John 5:3-5 (NKJV)

³ In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. ⁴ For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. ⁵ Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years.

The Jewish people believed that sickness and other infirmities were the result of sin—therefore to be healed from sickness was seen as the mercy of God toward sinners in having forgiven them of their sins.

This was probably why they named this place **Bethesda** (*house of mercy*).

And while it is true that the Bible doesn’t teach that all sickness can be traced back to sin in the life of the person afflicted—in this man’s case, his infirmity seems to have been the result of some kind of sin in his life (v.14).

Now, before we go any farther let me just say that some of your Bibles may have a footnote that says, “*the end of verse 3 and all of verse 4 are not found in the best manuscripts*”—please disregard that.

Without getting into a study on which manuscripts are the best (a subject that usually causes people’s eyes to glaze over)—let me just appeal to your common sense.

If you take the end of verse 3 and all of verse 4 out of the passage it would read like this—

John 5:2-3a, 5 (NKJV)

² Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. ³ In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed...

⁵ Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years.

That reading completely removes the reason for *why* all of these sick and handicapped people were gathered at the pool of Bethesda—the hope of being healed!

The fact that this man (and the rest of these folks) kept coming back to this pool tells me that this story was true.

It testifies to the validity of this account that people were really being healed on a regular basis or else they wouldn't keep coming back! Again, the driving force was hope!

And yet I'm calling this second main point—

II. The Hopeless Situation—v.5-7

Sometimes, people (like this crippled man) find hope in what, for all intents and purposes, seems like a hopeless situation—why? Because people need hope in their lives.

Hope is one of the things that gives us strength to go on and face each new day—even if it's a 'long-shot' hope bordering on a mathematical impossibility—in the minds of the desperate, it's still hope!

(As when people fly to other countries to try experimental cancer drugs)

For thirty-eight years this man had been dealing with some kind of infirmity that impaired his ability to walk (or possibly to even move).

Now, we're not told how long this man's family and friends had been carrying him down to this pool every day in the hope that he might be the first one into the water when the angel stirred it up—it could have been many years—maybe even for the entire thirty-eight years!

We can only imagine how miserable this man's life must have been as he lay there day after day hoping against hope that he might be healed.

One commentator offers this insight into what this scene was like—

"What a pathetic sight the crowd around the pool must have been! According to verse 3, "a great number of disabled people" were there. Not just a few, but hundreds of people gathered around those porches at Bethesda. The sick, including those with undiagnosed diseases. Those who were so feverish they had to stay in the shade because the heat of the sun was unbearable. The blind—some congenitally blind, some newly blind. The sightless huddled close to the edge of the pool, hoping someone would lead them into the pool when the waters quivered. The withered and the lame, who could not make it to the pool on their own. Their only hope to reach the waters was to crawl over others weaker than themselves. What a pitiful crowd of broken humanity! It does not take much imagination to see those withered, wasted bodies, to smell the stench, to see the filth, and to sense the pathos of the old and young among that impotent, suffering humanity. It had to be a horrible, distressing sight—except for one thing—Jesus was there."

Jesus is the only hope for the hopeless. No matter what the problem, or how impossible the situation—Jesus is the answer, in Him there is always hope!

John 5:5-7 (NKJV)

⁵ Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been *in that condition* a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" ⁷ The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me."

Now understand, Jesus knew this man's condition, what caused it, and how long he had suffered with it—just like He knows the physical, emotional and spiritual condition of every person in this room.

But look, why would the Lord even ask a question like this? I mean, it sounds ridiculous to ask a man who was suffering with this condition for thirty-eight years if he wanted to be healed—Isn't the answer obvious?!

Before I answer that, I'd like you to consider how *many* sick and handicapped people were there?—again, verse 3 tells us it was a ‘**great multitude**’.

And how many did Jesus heal?—**One**. He walked away and left everyone else unhealed.

This contradicts the teaching we're hearing today from charismatic preachers and teachers who are telling us it's God's will that *everyone* be healed of their sicknesses and infirmities.

And when you point out that not all Christians *are* healed or that in this story Jesus only healed one man and left the rest unhealed, they often respond—“*If they (Christians) had enough faith they would all be healed*” and “*the reason Jesus only healed one man out of hundreds at the Pool of Bethesda was because, the man in this story was the only one who had faith to be healed.*”

But as you read this story you realize that—not only didn't this man have faith to be healed—verse 13 tells us he didn't even know who Jesus was!

The issue that's being taught here is the sovereignty of God—not the faith of man.

The sovereignty of God means that God does what He wants—and we must accept that and submit to His sovereign will. (1John 5:14-15)

We know that Jesus went on to say that He only did the things His Father directed Him to do—things that would bring the most glory to God.

One of the reasons the Holy Spirit directed Jesus to heal this man was not simply to show mercy to someone who was suffering with a debilitating infirmity—but to use this story to teach all of us a spiritual lesson as well (hold on to that thought, we'll come back to it).

But getting back to our earlier question—why did Jesus ask this man if he wanted to be healed—isn't the answer obvious? Not really.

You see, there are a lot of people who are 'crippled' in life—not physically, they're crippled psychologically.

In other words—they are hindered in their ability to function as healthy people because of anger, hatred, bitterness, unforgiveness and other debilitating emotions that they have internalized over the years.

And as such, these have become so much a part of who they are for so long that they don't want to be 'healed' because they have come to depend on them as a 'crutch' to get them from day to day. (Elaborate)

Now, as we look at the man in our text—it could be that after thirty-eight years of being lame and having people support him, help him and literally carry him from place to place that he had gotten comfortable and used to his infirmity.

In other words, he had become dependent upon it like a 'crutch' to get him from day to day—and it could be that dependence upon others to do for him was more appealing than the independence and personal responsibility that a physical healing would bring into his life (which can be scary!).

And so, in the light of that, Jesus' question to this handicapped man suddenly doesn't seem so ludicrous.

But let's personalize this for a moment—if the Lord Jesus were to come to any number of Christians today and ask them, "*Do you want to be set free from (fill in the blank) and made whole?*"—honestly, I'm not sure they would say "Yes".

And that, in a nutshell, is the reason so many Christians remain crippled in their walk with God—because they don't want to let go of their *crutch* in life (whatever that might be)—they have come to depend on it to get them from day to day.

Listen, wholeness in life, which brings with it the ability to function as a healthy person from day to day, starts in the heart by letting go of things like: anger, resentment, bitterness, jealousy, unforgiveness—and especially, hatred.

If these are left undealt with they will cripple your ability to walk with God (not to mention destroy you from within).

And Jesus is asking you this morning—**“Do you want to be made well?”** (the Greek in v.6 means ‘healthy’)

But we so often do exactly what this man did when Jesus asked him if he wanted to be healed—he gave the Lord excuses *why* he wasn't healed—even blaming others for not helping him. (v.7)

Pastor Chuck Smith summed it up—“It's interesting, the man didn't answer the question of Jesus at all. The question was, *“Would you like to be healed?”* And all the man did was tell Jesus the reason why he *wasn't* healed. I think that a lot of times when the Lord comes and addresses our place of impotence by asking, *“Would you like to be set free?”*—“Well, Lord, you know, I have this problem and I have tried and...” we're just telling Him all of the reasons why we can't be set free. All of the reasons why we are continuing in our place of impotency rather than responding, *“Yes, I'd like to be set free.”* And so, the man gives to Jesus the reasons why he isn't and can't be healed. You probably know all the reasons why you're in the condition you're in. You could probably give the Lord a good explanation what's going on. *“This is what's happening. This is why I'm still in this same lame condition—why I'm not healed.”* The question was, *“Would you **like** to be healed?”*

III. The Sabbath Violation—v.8-13

John 5:8-13 (NKJV)

⁸ Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." ⁹ And immediately the man was

made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath. ¹⁰ The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry *your* bed." ¹¹ He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'" ¹² Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" ¹³ But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in *that* place.

That John makes it a point to tell us that Jesus did this healing on the Sabbath was no accident—he is letting us know that it was Jesus' Sabbath 'violations' that escalated the hatred of the Jews (Jewish leadership) toward Him throughout the remainder of His earthly ministry culminating in His crucifixion—as John clearly states in v.16:

John 5:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.

Not only did Jesus heal this man on the Sabbath—but then had the audacity to tell this formerly lame man to take up his bed (actually a sleeping-mat or a bedroll) and carry it away.

Rather than rejoicing that a man who had been lame for 38 years had been healed by Jesus (something the O.T. predicted Messiah would do when He came—Isa. 35:1–7), the Jews were upset that he was carrying his bed on the Sabbath.

Since John focuses our attention on the Sabbath, and since it was Jesus' supposed disregard and constant violations of the Sabbath that caused Israel's religious leadership to hate Him so vehemently—let's look at the Sabbath, what it meant and how Jesus dealt with it next time.

I. The Curious Narration—v.1-4

II. The Hopeless Situation—v.5-7

III. The Sabbath Violation—v.8-13

IV. The Practical Application—v.14-15

John 5:14-15 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." ¹⁵ The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

Notice that Jesus found him in the Temple (precincts).

Immediately after he was healed (implying his sin was forgiven)—the first thing he wanted to do was go to the Temple—to get back into fellowship with God!

I believe that he hadn't been to the Temple in 38 years—for 38 years sin had separated him from God and crippled his walk.

Once again, as we pointed out earlier, one of the reasons Jesus picked this man to heal was not simply to show mercy to someone who was suffering with a debilitating infirmity—but to use this story to teach all of us a spiritual lesson as well.

Initially, when Jesus asked this man if he wanted to be healed, he responded by giving the Lord excuses why he *hadn't* been healed and *couldn't* be healed—even blaming others for not *helping* him to be healed (v.7).

Many of us do the same thing—we tend to make excuses for ourselves, even blaming others for not helping us to walk with God.

I once had a person blame me for not being able to walk with God because I refused to disciple him one on one—therefore his carnal walk was my fault!

Don't blame your spiritual lameness on anyone else.

Jesus is not looking for excuses—He’s asking you a very simple question, “*Do you want to be made spiritually whole and healthy?*”—it’s either, “*Yes, I do*” or “*No, I don’t*”—it’s up to you, it’s a matter of your will.

After asking this man that question—then Jesus simply said to him, “*Rise, take up your bed and walk.*”

Notice that Jesus gave this man an impossible command to obey (impossible in his own strength).

And yet, when he *willed* to obey Jesus’ command—when he willed to do the Lord’s will he discovered that—everything he needed to obey was supplied to him from God!

Every one of the commands the Lord has given us in His Word are impossible for us to obey in our own strength—and the Lord knows that!

“*Walk with Me; serve me; glorify Me; be victorious; be holy; love your enemies...*”—all go beyond our ability to obey.

But if we will “**will**” to obey—if we will passionately desire in our heart to obey what God has commanded us—He will supply us with the power to obey.

As someone has said, “*The Lord’s commandments are His enablement’s.*”

The Lord knows we are weak and our frame is but dust—He knows He will have to give us the ability to obey His commands.

He’s not asking us to have the ability, but what He is expecting from us is to have the desire—the will to obey.

He doesn't want to hear excuses as to why you haven't been able to stop drinking, taking drugs, looking at junk on the internet or letting go and forgiving those who have hurt you.

He's simply asking you this morning, "*Do you want to be healthy in your emotional and spiritual life?*"—your answer is a simple "Yes" or "No."

And if the answer is 'Yes' and you begin to act on that desire—He will supply all the power you need to obey.

This could apply to anything—to your marriage, your ministry, a weakness or area of bondage in your life (alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, pornography...)—Jesus is asking you, "*Do you want to be healed, delivered—do you want to be made whole?*"

He didn't tell this man, "*Have more faith!*" "*Have more self-esteem!*" "*Visualize yourself running thru a meadow!*"

He asked him, "*Do you want to be healed?*"

Notice that Jesus' command was 3-fold: Rise. Take up your bed. Walk.

1. Rise—*will* to do the impossible out of obedience and faith—and then begin to *act* on your faith.

2. Take up your bed—don't leave anything behind that you could use to backslide with (make a clean break with your sin and your past—old friends, old places, old way of thinking...).

3. Walk—don't expect to be carried any longer. You're no longer a spiritual cripple. You are now a new creation (if you've just gotten saved), more than a conqueror so—get up from your spiritual sickbed and walk with God (take responsibility for your spiritual life and make the effort to be all that God, by His grace and strength, has commanded you to do and be)!

As Christians we all want to walk with God—but very few of us are willing to kneel before God.

In other words, we want spiritual wholeness, strength and victory—but so often we’re not willing to let go of our sin.

We’re not willing to kneel before God, acknowledging, confessing and repenting of our sin—of those things that have crippled us in our walk with Him for so long.

One pastor gave this challenge to the people of God—

“Do you want to be healed? Do you want spiritual wholeness? Or do you just want to feel sorry for yourself, even to the point of blaming everyone else for the mess that is your spiritual life? Truth be told, many Christians don’t want to walk with God in power and holiness—why? Because they really love their sin and don’t want to let it go. Out of that great multitude of sick and lame people by the Pool of Bethesda—only one was healed. Will you be that one? Will you be the one who wills to do His will and steps out in faith to obey? He will give you the power of His Holy Spirit to be able to obey when so many others stay impotent and crippled in their walk with Him.

Remember, only one disciple was willing to obey Jesus’ command to step out of the boat onto the Sea of Galilee. Only Peter was willing to obey an impossible command while the other disciples stayed back in the boat. I’m sure they could have all given the Lord good excuses for why they hadn’t stepped out—possibly even blaming each other. The Lord isn’t looking for excuses, He’s looking for faith and obedience. Peter willed to do Jesus’ will and by faith stepped out to obey. And because of it, he was the only one who experienced the miracle of walking on water. This lame man is being lifted up by the Holy Spirit as a lesson for all of us. The difference between victory and defeat, between the miraculous and mundane, between a dynamic spiritual walk and an impotent one is simpler than you think—will to do God’s will, and then rise, take up your bed and walk!”