The Gospel of John: *Do You Want to be Healed?*
John 5:1-16

Our journey through the Gospel of John brings us now to 5:1-16. Please stand for the reading of God’s Word:

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

2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic[a] called Bethesda,[b] which has five roofed colonnades. 3 In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.[c] 5 One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” 7 The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” 8 Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.”

9 And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath. 10 So the Jews[d] said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.”

11 But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’”

12 They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk’?” 13 Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. 14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” 15 The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. 16 And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

My message this morning is entitled with a question: *Do You Want to be Healed?* I hope you will dwell upon that question throughout the course of my message, and we will deal with that question later on this morning. My message is divided into four subheadings: 1) The Most Ironic and Important Question; 2) Grace and Command; 3) Adventures in Missing the Point; and 4) Revisiting the Question.

I. The Most Ironic and Important Question

We’re not sure how much time has passed since we last saw Jesus at work in the region of Galilee. All that John records is that one of the three great Jewish festivals is once again taking place in Jerusalem, and Jesus…like thousands of others…has made the trip to Jerusalem for the celebration. John continues beginning in vs. 2:

2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. 3 In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.”

Archeologists believe they have identified the ancient pool referenced here in John 5 located near what Nehemiah identified as the “sheep gate” in Nehemiah 3. The pool, located in the north quarter of the old city, was likely fed by some kind of an underground spring; and, of course, the ancients believed that there was mystical healing power in water. John reports that five roofed colonnades had been constructed to shelter the host of “invalids” who gathered around this pool each day…among whom were the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed.

Now, if you have your Bible or your Bible app available, I want you to notice something. Look carefully at what follows the end of vs. 3? Do you notice anything unusual? If you are using a modern translation of the Bible, you’ll notice that there is no verse 4! In the ESV which I am using, we jump from vs. 3 straight to vs. 5. Why is that? Well, in some of our English translations, we find what biblical scholars refer to as a “scribal insertion” that makes up John 5:3b-4, and it says this: “*waiting for the moving of the water!* *for an angel of the Lord went down at*
certain seasons into the pool, and stirred the water: whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had."

If you are using the KJV, you will see that vs. 3b-4 are included in your translation. And here’s why: because those who worked on publishing the King James Version of the Bible in the early 17th century (and other English translations in that century) had the benefit of only 16 Greek manuscripts, not including the earliest manuscripts that were later discovered by archeologists in the 19th and 20th centuries. Today we have access to 5,856 different Greek manuscripts or fragments, many of which date back a good bit earlier than those copies used by translators in the 17th century. To be fair, the KJV is incredibly accurate and reliable, and what we have here in John 5 is one of the few occasions where the earliest manuscripts differ from the later manuscripts. Thus, because we do not find vss. 3b-4 in the earliest Greek manuscripts of John, our modern translations omit the second part of vs. 3 and all of vs. 4…although you will find a footnote in our modern versions acknowledging the discrepancy.

Don’t let that bit of trivia bother you. There is still value in what we can learn from this scribal insertion. Clearly, at some point in history, some people believed that when the water bubbled up in that pool, it was because an angel of the Lord was the cause, and thus whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water would be healed. As we’ll see in just a moment, that was certainly the belief held by the man we are considering this morning.

OK, let’s return to the text, beginning with vs. 5: One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

Let us first acknowledge that Jesus could have been hanging out anywhere in the great city of Jerusalem during a festival week. He could have been spending His time in the marketplace; He could have been debating the Pharisees in the Temple or simply enjoying the beautiful gardens that surrounded the capital city. But where do we find Jesus? We find Him among les misérables…He is among the “in-valids,” those riddled with sickness and confined by their handicaps. Don’t miss this Church—you will always find Jesus powerfully present and at work among the hurting and the outcast. Those deemed of little value in the eyes of the world are precious in the sight of our Lord.

Now, while quietly observing this hurting mass of humanity at the pool, Jesus is drawn to a particularly pathetic soul…a man who has had no use of his legs for 38 years. I suspect we all know people who are bound to a wheelchair. No doubt these souls know suffering and hardship in a way that most of us cannot imagine. Many years ago, I visited with a young girl in Guatemala City who had been shot in the back and was thus crippled for life. She was very poor and could ill-afford proper care. I was visiting her with a doctor friend from Hilton Head Island, so I was there when he examined her horrible bed sores that resulted from years of sitting in a chair. The mere sight of her enflamed and atrophied legs was almost more than I could look upon.
Imagine now a first century, middle-eastern man who endured this condition with no modern medicines, no antibiotic cream, and no skilled nursing care for 38 years. Many paraplegics have no control of their bladders or bowels…thus we can only imagine how this man looked and how he smelled. Though somebody brings him to the pool each day, we learn from his own testimony that he is then left there alone, with no one to help him make it into the pool…into the healing waters…into the living water…so to speak. Given his issues with sanitation, we should not wonder that everyone conspired to keep this man OUT of the pool.

Let us now imagine this meeting…when our Lord, the Lamb of God, walks through the Sheep Gate…on a mission to heal the world. Jesus walks up to the man, and He looks upon him.

Church, let us confess and repent for all the times we have turned away from those in such dire circumstances. Far too many hurting souls have born the pain of God’s elect turning away, diverting their eyes…I make my own confession. It is hard to look upon human misery; and yet, like Peter and John later at the Beautiful Gate in Acts 3, Jesus looks upon the man…He looks into his weary and hopeless eyes, and He asks the most ironic and important question: “Do you want to be healed?”

At first glance, this question comes across as cruel and inappropriate, right? We can already imagine the meme on social media, featuring Jesus asking this poor soul if he wants to be healed, and the cripple replying, “No thanks…I’m just hanging out here working on my tan!” Indeed, asking a crippled man this question would be cruel and inappropriate for most people; and should you decide to visit a nursing home later today and you encounter those imprisoned to a bed, I suggest that you resist asking this question! However, for the Son of God…for the One who had the power to heal and every intention to heal, the question is not cruel, but absolutely appropriate: do you WANT to be healed?

Friends, Jesus will not heal a person against his will. As He said to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well: “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is talking to you, you would ask…and He would give you living water!” Asking…expressing a heartfelt desire for change…admitting that we don’t “got this” and that we are powerless to heal ourselves…that’s all part of how it works with Jesus. He will not heal us against our wills.

I suspect some of you are still offended by this question. You are offended by human suffering altogether, and you are offended that God allow this poor soul to suffer for 38 years…how dare Jesus now ask this man if he wants to be healed…he should have never been crippled in the first place.

Now listen: The Bible tells us that human misery and suffering is inevitable for those who breathe air because of the Fall. In Genesis 3 we learn that sin entered the world through human choice, and ever since the curse has remained upon all human beings as well as all of creation. Such is why some are born into deformed or incomplete bodies…things are not as they should be. Some are born without appendages, some with mental handicaps, and some never get to be born at all due to miscarriages or abortions. Our world is fallen, our bodies are fallen…and corrupted bodies produce corrupted bodies. In John 9 we will read of a man born blind, and his blindness was neither his fault nor that of his parents.
However, as we all know, some people bring great suffering upon themselves (and others) due to the consequence of their sinful choices; and here in this story, we are left to assume that this man sinned nearly four decades ago and his paralysis was the consequence. We’ll come back to that in a bit.

Regardless of the cause of our condition, Jesus comes as God’s agent to restore all that was lost in the Fall. Jesus comes with healing and forgiveness for those who will ask. But we must sincerely desire to be healed. Which begs the question…why would we NOT want to be healed?

When we think about this man bound to a mat for 38 years, it seems obvious to us that he would want to be healed, right? Isn’t that obvious? Some have suggested that perhaps he wouldn’t want to be healed because he made a decent living as a beggar and he wouldn’t want to have to find a job like other people who have to work for a living. I can’t tell you why this man wouldn’t want to be healed, but clearly Jesus thinks it is worth asking the question.

Let’s take a moment and consider His question regarding our own lives this morning. I suspect if you were bound to a wheelchair with bedsores, you would immediately say, “YES LORD! PLEASE HEAL ME NOW!”…right?

But what if you are addicted to drugs? From the perspective of your family and your friends, it’s a no brainer that you would want Jesus to heal you, to deliver you from the ravages of your addiction—that seems obvious, right? But is it?

If Jesus is going to heal you from your addiction, what will that require of you for the rest of your life? No more drugs, right? Well…if your best friends are your drug buddies…if your favorite memories all happen to be at tailgating parties where you are high…if your girlfriend only finds you attractive when you are both high…then you might hesitate when Jesus asks you, “Do you want to be healed?”

What if your illness is materialism and greed? What will it look like for the rest of your life if Jesus heals you of that malady? How would that affect your job, your portfolio, and your next purchase? What if your paralysis is unforgiveness? What will Jesus require of you should He heal your heart…it means you would have to forgive that person, right? You see where I’m going?

C.S. Lewis often writes about how most of us don’t want healing from Jesus…we just want pain management. We don’t want the tooth pulled; we just want some medicine to keep it from hurting. We don’t want to be made new; we just want to be slightly improved!

Church, the question may seem ironic, but it’s the most important question you must ask yourself this morning: do you want to be healed? Will you accept the responsibility that comes with the grace so freely offered to you by Jesus? The grace comes first, but then His command will follow! A healed life is a changed life, and a changed life often draws some unwelcomed attention from those who liked us better when we were bound to our mat! Are you willing to live as one who has been healed…to be identified as one who has been healed?
In my 30 years of serving Jesus, I have witnessed scores of people who listen to the Gospel with eagerness and interest. They examine the evidence and discern that the claims of Jesus are true and historically reliable. They look around the church and applaud all that is being done to serve the poor and help the needy. But when at last it comes to answering this question posed by our Lord, their answer is… “no thank you…at least, not yet.” And then they are gone. You would be amazed how many people…trapped in the sickness of sin and even significant suffering…will look at the loving offer of Jesus, and politely decline. They go away thinking to themselves… “I want to be healed…but not yet.” “I want to be saved before I die…but not yet.” I’m not yet ready to give up the drink. I’m not yet ready to let go of my resentment. I need to make a little more money first. Many of us fear what we would lose should Jesus heal us today…as crazy as that sounds. Friends, Jesus understands us better than we understand ourselves…that’s why He asks a question that we initially think is stupid and cruel…but upon inspection, we discover it is disturbingly profound: Do you even WANT to be healed? Yes or no? There is no half-measure with our Lord. He hasn’t come to improve the old man…He has come to kill it, and to create a new man in its place. You will never be able to heal yourself; there is no other way to be healed; but you must ask Him…and make no mistake: once Jesus heals you, your life will never be the same. Again, please ask yourself: do you want to be healed?

Let us now look to how this man answers the question of our Lord.

II. Grace and Command

The man does not give us the answer we are hoping for. He does not say, “Sir, give me this living water…” Instead, …the sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.”

The weary man complains that he has been abandoned by all. And even worse, others step over and pass him by on those occasions when he tries to drag himself into the pool. In his response we hear the blame and anger of one who thinks of himself as a victim. “Those people abandoned me.” “Those people cut in line and wouldn’t help me.” His answer is likely an accurate statement, but we sense that this man has alienated every person who ever tried to help him. He has alienated everyone around him, such that they think nothing of stepping over him amid his curses and complaining. A nobler spirit would have simply responded, “Yes sir, I very much desire to be healed,” but this man is jaded. And we understand that, right? He has had a hard life. But how many of you know that it is difficult…sometimes next to impossible…to help those who have developed a victim complex, for their whole identity is based upon blame. Often those with the victim identity refuse to take any responsibility for their condition or for their betterment.

It may be for this very reason that Jesus chooses to heal this man with a command: “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.”

If you think about it, this command is also ironic, and potentially offensive, right? Jesus gives no credence to the man’s complaint. He does not rebuke the man’s relatives for abandoning him; He does not rebuke those standing by the pool for their lack of concern. Jesus doesn’t play the blame game. When He looks into our eyes, He is dealing with us alone…He will deal with others in their own time and in His own way. So Jesus looks at this man, and He commands Him to get up! Whatever happens next will not depend on the man’s family or the calloused people at
the pool…whatever happens next depends on this man’s willingness to obey the command of
King Jesus!

Immediately this man has every reason to say, “If I could get up and walk, I wouldn’t be sitting
here at this pool you darn fool!” Or perhaps he might respond, “Tell those people to come over
here and help me for once, and I’ll try.” If he was a postmodern American, he might try to argue
that people on mats should be respected and admired with no expectation that they should have
to stand up in order to be validated! We can imagine a myriad of responses that would have
likely led to a different outcome here, but let us observe what happens next:

In vs. 9 we read: And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

By the grace of God, the man’s body is instantly healed; but the command that led to his healing
required that he get up. Church, God often commands us to do those things we feel are
impossible to do given our limitations, but then God empowers us to do those things that we
have been commanded to do! Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the man is healed; but the
healing is accompanied by a command: get up, take up your old bed, and start walking! Getting
healed by God, and then doing nothing, is not an option!

The man does what Jesus commands of him. He gets up, he takes up his bed, and walks! I think
we can assume there was a fair bit of shouting and crying and dancing that accompanied this
moment! No doubt all the people at the pool are making their way over, trying to figure out what
happened to this old guy they have seen sitting out here for years. Did he finally get in the pool?
Did that actually work for once? How in the world is it that he is walking?

Now, the text tells us that Jesus slips away…He is not yet eager to deal with a large crowd in
Jerusalem. And then we hear the most pathetic turn of events. What follows is what I call…

III. Adventures in Missing the Point

In vss. 9-11 we read: Now that day was the Sabbath. 10 So the Jews said to the man who had been
healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” 11 But he answered them, “The man who
healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’” 12 They asked him, “Who is the man who said to
you, ‘Take up your bed and walk’?” 13 Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had
withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.

This is just painful. As is often the case in the NT, Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath…and
we get the sense that He does this on purpose. And we should not think that it is any coincidence
that Jesus commands this man to pick up his bed and carry it. Jesus knew full well that the
legalistic Pharisees would confront any man carrying a bed on the Sabbath; and of course, that’s
exactly what happens. Church, notice how the religious list-makers completely miss the point
here! A man was just healed after 38 years of being confined to a mat, and they’re ticked off that
he is carrying that mat to the trash heap on the Sabbath. According to the Rabbinic code,
carrying something from a public place to your house was considered work, and the penalty for
doing this kind of work on the Sabbath was death by stoning!
But listen to the healed man when he is charged with breaking the sabbath: “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed and walk.’” In one sense the man is blaming Jesus; but in another sense, his response is perfect!

Church, why do we bear witness to the world that we love Jesus? Why do we honor His commands even when others scorn us and ridicule our faith? Why do we tell the truth when others want us to lie? Why do we turn the other cheek and show love for our enemies? Here’s why: because that MAN who healed me…that Man who saved me…that Man who gave me a new life when I was dead in my sin…because that Man said so. I am in debt to the one who healed me; so when He tells me to carry my mat and walk…that’s what I’m doing!

Church, our obedience doesn’t earn our healing…our healing earns our obedience! We willingly obey because of the grace we received when Jesus healed our souls and saved us from the penalty of our sin. We obey because we were slaves to unrighteousness; and He became sin who knew no sin that we might inherit HIS right standing with the Father. We obey because we were lost, but now we are found; we were blind, but now we see; we were crippled, but now we get to WALK! What a beautiful testimony for all of us to meditate upon. I hope you can see yourself in this story. If not, we must return to the question…I’ll come back to that in a minute.

Now…here’s another embarrassing observation: the man is healed, he’s walking for the first time in 38 years, but when the Jewish authorities ask who it was that told him to carry his bed, he doesn’t even know who healed him! How could that be? How rude and ungrateful could this man be? He didn’t even stop to ask for the name of the One who healed Him! He didn’t even say “thank you”? Clearly this story is NOT about healing…it’s about Jesus…but the man doesn’t even know His name.

Friends, did you ever recover from a terrible injury? Did you ever recover from the flu? Did you ever overcome an addiction? Did you ever enjoy a beautiful sunset or meet the love of your life or hold a newborn baby or swim in the ocean or master a profound math problem? Now who was that who made those things possible? What was His name? Did you even say thank you? The whole world enjoys grace upon grace from our Father and our Savior, and so many do not even know His name. They credit time and chance and coincidence…they credit the doctor or the antibiotic…they take for granted bodies that heal themselves and a brain that has consciousness. They assume the precarious order of life on planet earth happened by accident…and they do not even know His name!

Ahh…but He knows our name, thanks be to God. Look what happens next beginning with vs. 14: 14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” 15 The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. 16 And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

Jesus is not just in the business of saving people; He is also the Lord of those He has saved. So Jesus finds this man in the Temple…Jesus comes to the man in the place of worship…a place where he has likely never been before since paralytics were not allowed in the Temple courts. And there Jesus says, “See…you are well!” The point is clear. Jesus is saying in no uncertain terms: I did that…you didn’t. First comes grace, then comes the command: “Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” Obedience should be this man’s worshipful response to
being healed. As Paul writes in Romans 12:2, “In view of God’s mercy, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind…”

This man’s long suffering came as a result of his own choices...bad choices with horrible consequences. Jesus, the personification and agent of God’s mercy, has delivered the man from his former condition and the consequences of his mistakes, but Jesus knows there are worse things that await those who forsake the grace that was given to them. Those of us who have been healed, saved, and rescued are those without excuse. We know what Christ has done for us. We remember what our lives were like on the mat…so this command to “sin no more” is not a threat; it is an opportunity to show our gratitude for God’s unmerited grace. Yes…we are still those who will fail and fall, but we are not to be those who go right back to doing those things that put us on the mat in the first place! Those who have been healed by grace are those who gladly live a life of repentance...we are those who are turning away from sin and being transformed into new creatures. Unfortunately for most of us, old habits die hard, so thanks be to God for His grace that is greater than all of our sin! Let’s us trust that God’s grace could even cover this poor fool who, in discovering Jesus’ identity, immediately runs back to the Jewish authorities and identifies Jesus as the one who healed him!

Why would he do that? To save his own hide. As I mentioned, carrying your mat on the Sabbath was punishable by stoning! So this man, who was healed just hours ago, thinks nothing of giving up Jesus to the authorities in order to save his own skin. And here’s the consequence: “This was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.” Clearly the man’s legs were healed, but there’s still some work to be done on his heart. That’s true for many of us.

We’ll pick up the story here next week.

IV. Revisiting the Question

Let us close now by revisiting the question: Do you want to be healed? Church, that question is not a one-time question...even for those of us who have experienced the saving grace of Jesus in the past, that question is one He continues to ask us. Why? Because we need to agree with Jesus on those things that are broken and in need of His powerful healing…and that keeps happening for the rest of our lives. You may be forgiven, but you still struggle with pornography. Do you want to be healed? You may be forgiven, but you still struggle with resentment. Do you want to be healed? You may be forgiven, but you are still a list-keeper...you struggle with legalism and self-righteousness. Do you want to be healed?

Still others of you have never agreed with Jesus on your condition. You have declined His invitation time and again when asked about being healed. You continue to tell yourself that you will take up his offer later, after the big deal is signed...after you make the money you want to make...after you “sow your oats” in college...after you see where this affair leads you. I beg you friend: wait no longer. Even this night you may very well breathe your last, and then it will be too late. Grace is offered to the living. Come in while the door is still open; for a time will come when the door will be closed, and those who have not come in will remain apart from God’s saving grace...it is an end we would wish upon no one.

Do you want to be healed? Say yes friends, and take up your mat, and walk! Will you pray with me?