

JESUS ALONE IS OUR ONLY HEALER

John 5: 1-18 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

So far in our Gospel of John series, we have been tracking with Jesus from Jerusalem north to the northernmost tip of Judea on the Jordan River, then northwest through Samaria to Galilee, to Cana, but now, without any mention of chronology, we find ourselves with Jesus in Jerusalem, and one more feature, here is Jesus alone, apart from His disciples. The timing of this miracle or sign of Jesus was a feast of the Jews in Jerusalem, John 5:1. For the Jews, there were three feasts of obligation, and every adult male living within twenty miles of Jerusalem was duty bound, and legally bound to attend them, Passover, the Feasts of Weeks at the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

Our world today, as well as in Jesus' day, is a world filled with sin, disease, sexual addictions, calamity, and death. Jesus this day, on the Sabbath Day, paid a visit to the Pool of Bethesda, apparently a kind of artesian well-fed pool that would be stirred with an influx of waters, and said to have therapeutic and medical healing in the waters. Yet, when Jesus arrived at the Pool of Bethesda, it was a pool full of invalids, who were blind, lame, or paralyzed. One of these invalids was a veteran attendee at the Pool of Bethesda, where no one was there who was healed but Jesus Himself. These waters appeared to have been fed by artesian springs, bringing an influx of warm therapeutic water. The name of Bethesda means "house of mercy," but when Jesus arrived, the pool was a scene of hopelessness.

Some of you have the King James Version, and I will read the end of verse three and verse four, which words do not appear in the earliest manuscripts of the Bible. These words appear at the bottom of the ESV Bible, and they say all the people were "waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water; whosoever then first, after the troubling of the water, stepped in, was made whole of whatever disease he had." This explanation helps us understand why people waited at the pool for healing.

Our statement of faith in our church in Article 1 states, "We believe the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, to be the inspired Word of God, without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men and the Divine and final authority for Christian faith and life. Whether verses 3 and 4 are a scribal commentary or part of the text, the words explain exactly the prevailing view of the people in Jesus' day about the healing properties of the pool of Bethesda. The people who went there for healing believed that once a year, an angel came and troubled or stirred up the water, and the first one in the pool when the angel stirred up the water was healed. In 1888, a reservoir was found in northeast Jerusalem which had a pool with five colonnades, or porticoes—five porches held up by columns, where the sick and invalids could rest and be protected from bad weather. On the wall of this pool, were found, a faded fresco of an angel troubling the water. That day when Jesus healed this man, there was no attention given to an angel's yearly visit to the pool, but it did draw the invalids attention drew to Jesus alone and to His divine healing power.

As I have examined this text, I have seen three different sets of concerns in each of the leading characters regarding this miracle of Jesus. First, there are the concerns of the sick man, then the concerns of Jesus, and thirdly, the concerns of the Pharisees. These three sets of concerns teach us volumes, if we will open our hearts to God's Word this morning. What are these three sets of concerns and what lessons do they teach us?

THE SAVIOR'S CONCERN TEACHES US THREE TRUTHS. (I.)

Jesus is concerned (1) if we want to be healed. Notice verses 5-6. We read, "One man was there who had been a 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?" There are sin sicknesses as well as physical sicknesses. Many choose not to be healed of their lying lips, their gossip, their lusts and addictions. Million want to be healed, and millions want to stay sick or sin sick. Notice Jesus' prior knowledge of this man prior to coming to this pool, we read in v. 6 that Jesus knew that he had already been there a long time. Jesus knew his situation. When we think of Jesus, do we remember He has known all about our problem all along? Jesus knows us perfectly, from our inside out, and all we have ever felt, or thought, or done. In Psalm 139: 2-4, we read, "You know when I sit down and when I rise up. You discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, You know it altogether." Jesus didn't have to go to this pool. He chose to go there. He didn't have to go. He didn't sneak up on this man or stumble onto him. Jesus knew what He was doing in the same way when He said, "I must needs go through Samaria."

Jesus asks us questions so we will articulate where we are, though He knows what we feel. Jesus asked this man in v. 7, "Do you want to be healed?" What a question Jesus asked this man who had been regularly lying here at the pool for 38 years. It was almost as if Jesus was asking him, "Have you lost all your hope? Is there anything left of hope within you today?"

R. C. Sproul once told a story about when he worked at a gym in the East Liberty section of Pittsburg. One day, when he left work and headed home after dark, just as he was walking past a jewelry store, he saw a man rush out the door with the owner right behind him, hollering, "Stop, thief" The thief ran into R.C. Sproul, and almost knocked him down. At that point, R.C. grabbed the man and said, "Hold it! R. C. half expected the man to pull a gun and shoot him, but he only looked at R.C; and he said, "I give up." Soon the police came and took the thief to jail. The next day, R. C. met one of the police officers who arrested the thief, who was a man

R.C. knew. R. C. asked the officer about this thief and about his strange behavior. The officer said, "We know the man well. We often put him in jail for six months, but the day he gets out, he goes and does something, so he'll be arrested again. That's his hope in committing a crime. He is always in hopes of getting caught because he isn't able to survive outside of jail. He is used to living behind bars, where he has a bed every night and three meals a day. The man was in a paralyzed condition, threatened by life outside of jail, so he could not live outside of prison.

Jesus is concerned (2) about our bodily illnesses and diseases, sometimes healing us and sometimes not.

Notice in verse 9, we read, “And at once, the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.” Yet, there is no mention of any other of these invalids at the pool of Bethesda, that were healed by Jesus. This is strange to read as we have so many books written about Jesus wanting everyone well. C. S. Lovett in his book, “Jesus Wants You Well,” makes the assumption found in his title. To prove it, he misuses scripture. Using Matthew 6: 33 as his proof text, he quotes Jesus saying, “Seek you first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” He writes, “This is the golden rule for all Christians. Healing for our bodies is included in the “all things” package.” This is simply not true, for Jesus was speaking in context about worrying about our food to eat, what to drink, and what clothing to wear. (Mt. 6:25) Because of sin in our world, all of us will die, many of us from known diseases. However, Jesus, our Healer, has promised us eternal healing when we receive our glorified bodies. That’s our inheritance in Glory! Revelation 21:4, promises us an end to sickness. We read, “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Thank God when we face sickness and disease, we know Jesus cares. He is our sympathizing priest who often heals us, but He will ultimately heal every believer when He takes us Home.

Jesus is most concerned (3) about our soul’s healing and our spiritual healing.

Notice verses 13 and 14. “Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in that place. 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.” There is a connection between sin and sickness sometimes, but not always, as in John 9:1. Nevertheless, Genesis 38:1-5 tells the story of the death of Er and Onan—sexual sins that led to death. Miriam opposing Moses led to her leprosy—Numbers 12. Bitterness, grudges, and challenging God’s leadership led to swallow alive in the earth, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram—Numbers 16. You may say, that is Old Testament, but I call you to read I Cor. 11: 27-30. Even the sin of not confronting a brother or sister about sin can end in us becoming vulnerable to temptation. (Galatians 6: 1) Jesus was more interested ultimately in this man’s inner healing from sin and shame. It was as if Jesus was saying, “My greatest purpose in healing you, was for the sake, of your holiness—to make you holy.” What was the main issue with Jesus? The main issue was holiness, even beyond good health. Jesus healed him to make him holy. Jesus main healing was the healing of this man’s soul. Jesus’ healing is a gift. It’s free. We can’t earn it. We weren’t good enough for it. He chooses to heal us freely and He wants us to live in the power of our healing, the gift of His grace. We can be healthy at the moment, and that is not God’s greatest gift. The question is, “Have we stopped our bitterness, have we ceased to lie and gossip, have we dropped our grudges, have we surrendered our pride to Jesus, have we accepted His discipline in our life or have we tried to prove we are above being disciplined? If we refuse God’s discipline, it proves we do not belong to Him. There is a 2nd set of concerns:

THE SICK MAN’S CONCERNS TEACH US TWO TRUTHS. (II.)

The sick man's concern (1) was affected by his illness so that he had wrong attitudes and compared his lot with all the other invalids at the pool.

Notice verse 7. After Jesus asked the man if he wanted to be healed, he never said yes or no. Rather than say, "Yes, please heal me," this man had learned over 38 years the rule of the pool of Bethesda which was, "Everyone for himself." And sadly, this man was always too slow to make it first to the water when it was stirred." Can you imagine the animosity that developed as all these mournful, withered patients wailed as they saw another invalid beat them to the water's edge. II Corinthians 10:12 states, "When we compare ourselves among ourselves, we are not wise." We are without understanding. Also, this "me first" attitude at the pool may well have led this diseased man to be bitter with God for allowing the fastest sick folk to be healed while the sickest and slowest invalids only got worse. Jesus soon corrected this man's wrong views and concerns. Nevertheless, the man's complaint in verse 7 sounds like he felt cheated year after year, as he saw others make it to the water first. I believe today that many of us know the temptation to resent God and blame Him for healing some folk and leaving us sick. It is only natural to be jealous, but once we are saved, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. God wants us to rejoice with those who rejoice, even if our own lot doesn't appear as blessed as their lot.

The sick man's concern (2) can also be ours and lead us to expect less from Christ than Jesus wants to give us.

Notice verse 6 and remember that Jesus knew this man had been there a long time, namely, 38 years, v. 5. What kind of hope would Jesus' question have given to you? Believing as this man did, that the only hope he had was in being first to touch the water when it was troubled. So, what was his hope from Jesus? It appears he was as much as asking Jesus to stay with him and get him in the pool first when the waters were troubled. Yet Jesus gave him a welcome surprise by saying, "Get up, v. 8, take up your bed and walk." What a challenge this was as Jesus was asking a man who couldn't walk for 38 years to do what he was unable to do. But this man somehow trusted Jesus and put forth the effort. He obeyed, and instantly, he could move. He trusted Jesus and he was healed by his obedience to Jesus' impossible command. Thank the Lord, Jesus didn't say, "Get up, and then the man tried and collapsed. Many "healers" say this, and they say, "You are being healed, so just keep trying, and you'll receive your healing." Medical healings are often gradual, and God works through medicine. Yet, when Jesus healed, He never beat around the bush, or told people to keep trying to get up and just keep repeating His words. Jesus healed them immediately.

Notice verse 9. We read, "And at once, the man was healed, and he took up his bed/pallet and walked." Hallelujah! There is no Healer like Jesus my Lord. In our sicknesses, let's never give up on God. Expect great things from the Lord. God may yet surprise you with joy. Paul writes in Ephesians 3:20-21, "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." All glory to Jesus! Jesus amazingly keeps the focus of this man not on anyone but Jesus. Jesus knew what He had done, as He did it on the Sabbath, but this man's joy knew no bounds. 3rd,

THE PHARISEES CONCERNS (3) TEACH US TWO THINGS. (III.)

The Pharisees extreme legalism (1) robbed them of all joy. We read in verses 10-13, “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.” But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk. They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk’?” 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.” Notice they cared nothing about the man’s joyful healing. That’s what legalism does to us all. The Pharisees superimposed on the law of God their own hair-splitting distinctions and restrictions. Instead of looking on the Sabbath as a day of special consecration to do works of worship and gratitude for salvation God gives us, they viewed Sabbath as a day to cease from all work to thus merit salvation. For them the Sabbath meant idleness; for Jesus it meant a day to work the works of God. For them the Sabbath meant hardship in obeying legalistic rules. For Jesus, the Sabbath meant rest from the labor of legalism and working to make a living. The Old Testament clearly prohibited common labor for profit on the Sabbath. Yet for a healed man to walk home, carrying his pallet was hardly marketing or trading for gain. Are you and I like these hair-splitting Pharisees? Are we robbed of joy in Jesus, and seeking to rob others of their joy in Jesus? Are we so concerned with what is wrong in a healed believer or what’s wrong in a new believer that we fail to notice, “They are healed. They are saved!” God forgive us. May we drop our foolish legalism and let Jesus fill us with His love and joy.

The Pharisees legalism (2) blinded them as it will blind us to the truth. We read in verses 15-18, “The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.” Legalism includes all kinds of things. There is only one right Bible version.” There is only one right kind of clothing or right hairdo. There is only one way to worship—it must be all hymns, or all worship songs. There is only one way to praise the Lord. It must be in tongues or if it is, that is of the devil. And the beat of legalism goes on. Legalism blinded the Pharisees to the truth that they misunderstood it, and they accused God the Son who made the Sabbath of violating what He established. Jesus was saying, “I and My Father have one task and it doesn’t stop for the Sabbath, and that task is the healing of people’s souls. Thus, the Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ was rejected as Jesus was accused of blasphemy. Beloved, are we also blinded by rules and regulations we have made as the Pharisees were? One truth in this sign of Jesus consumes me. What is it? Jesus had in His heart and life and will, in a moment, what this sick man had longed for, for 38 years. What are your deepest longings? If those are holy longings, they are all available in Jesus. As the word got around, I wonder how many invalids kept waiting at the pool of Bethesda for an angel to stir the water. I close with a song that fills my heart today, written in 1915 by Harry Dixon Loes. It is “All Things in Jesus.”