

John 5:1-15 (NIV) Do You Want To Be Healed? Are You Ready for a Change?

¹ Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. ² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie--the blind, the lame the paralyzed. ⁴ ⁵ One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" ⁷ "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." ⁸ Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." ⁹ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, ¹⁰ and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." ¹¹ But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" ¹² So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" ¹³ The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. ¹⁴ Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." ¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

Are You Ready for a Change? Do you want to be healed?

The call of God on your life is hard for you to resist. The call of God on your life is difficult for you to escape. For when God speaks, you will answer. And when God moves, you will follow. (amen!)

When God drops some people in your path and redirects your course, you will respond. And when God takes you through some stuff that you have difficulty handling, you will pray. (Have I got a witness here?)

For it is when you are faced with making a decision and you want to make sure you make the right choice, you will pray. And when you desire to elevate from where you are, and not procrastinate to where you are to go,

you will pray. And when you get fed up with being stuck like Chuck, and you are sick and tired of being sick and tired, you will pray. And when you recognize that the longer you live, the more you need God, and the more you rely on God you recognize the longer you live, you see the value of prayer.

The call that God puts on your life - it is irresistible, it is non-refutable, it is non-negotiable, it is non-transferable, it is not exchangeable. It is a call that God gives you and it is a call that you must answer. (Amen)

And before I go on, let me help you understand that a call from God is more than a call to preach, or teach or to be in some kind of church work. No, no, no, God's call is much broader than church vocation and ministry and vocation. For you see that is often where we draw the line and remove ourselves from truly following God claiming that God only calls people when God is looking for preachers.

No, God calls folk to be school teachers and school principals, and nurses, and cafeteria workers, and bank tellers, and flight attendants, and pilots and cab drivers, and long distance truck drivers, and presidents of countries, and social workers, and case workers, and landscapers, and UPS drivers and mail carriers, and whoever and whatever God needs to get God's word of love to all of God's people.

You see we must not get it confused and think that God only calls women and men to preach and do other preacher kind of stuff. No, God calls us to do all kinds of work and we must not confuse it.....it's like the young fellow down in Lancaster, who was out in the field one day, lying on his back, resting from his farm work, and he looked up in the sky and he saw the clouds form in the letters G.P. G. P.

And as he thought about the hard, hot days of farming down in Lancaster, and as he wiped his forehead dry, wiping off the many hours of sweat given to farming, and as he looked at the calluses on his hands from holding a plow, walking behind a mule, he saw in those clouds the letters G.P. G.P. and he knew that was God telling him to go preach" for G.P stood for "Go Preach".

And as he got up and ran and told his daddy about his divine intervention from heaven, his daddy listened to him for a minute and then shocked him back into reality, with a different interpretation of the letters G.P. for after realizing that this boy of his had wasted half the day lying on his back, watching the clouds his daddy said, boy, G.P. does not mean go preach, G.P. means "go plow".

And many of us need to see and hear God today with some clearer instructions on what we are supposed to be doing.

But not only that, I think we can also do a little inventory and see like the shepherds in the text that God can also use some simple folk doing a simple job to deliver a saving message. Let me say that again, simple folk, doing a simple job, to deliver a saving message. Change can run like a steam roller over people.

One of the reasons leaders decide to settle for the status quo rather than leading change is because they've heard the horror stories of how people get crushed in the process of change.

Change can run like a steam roller over people. We've seen it happen in the corporate world and we've seen it happen in ministry.

In our text this morning, Jesus helps this man, who had been an invalid for 38 years, prepare for change.

I. HE IDENTIFIED WHAT HE WANTED

First of all, Jesus encouraged the man to say what he wanted. Verse 6 says, "When Jesus saw him lying there - He learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, He asked him, do you want to get well?" That sounds like an absurd question. For of course this man wanted to get well for you wouldn't ask a starving man, "Do you want food?" would you? Or would you ask a homeless woman do you want shelter. This appears to be an absurd question.

But actually, it was a very valid question, for there are people who, if given an opportunity for healing might actually choose to remain sick. I think I need to say that again: for there are people who, if given an opportunity for healing might actually choose to remain sick.

Why? Well because right now they're free of some unpleasant responsibilities, and to remain sick means they don't have to change.

Let me say it this way: if given the opportunity for healing but to exercise the option to remain sick might mean for some: they get sympathy by complaining about their sickness.

For some; they can manipulate people by being sick, for some; they can punish themselves if they feel guilty. So hear my statements again there are people who, if given an opportunity for healing, might actually choose to remain sick.

I read that only 50% of the people who are sick I mean really sick with some kind of ailment; and need to go to the doctor actually go, and only 50% of those who go, actually get their prescription filled, and only 50% of those with a filled prescription really take their medication as they should. Which in simple mathematical breakdown.....that equates to 12.5 out of 100 people getting treated for being ill and thus leaving 87.5 of the 100 walking around sick as a dog.

Which again proves my statement that some folks...just want to remain sick!

Illustration: Dave Reaver, disabled Viet Nam veteran, tells of a young man in the 1960's who didn't want to be drafted. So he had all his teeth pulled out to make himself unfit for military duty. But when he finally took his physical, to be admitted into military service; he was declared unfit because of flat feet!

So when Jesus asked, "Do you want to get well?" He seems to be saying, "You have friends who bring you here and you've developed friendships with others who come here regularly. If I heal you, your life will do a complete reversal. If I heal you, you'll be expected to get a job and If I heal you you'll be expected to relate to people on a different basis.

If I heal you, you'll be expected to stop making excuses. If I heal you, you'll be expected to step up to the plate, be responsible, show up on time, stop leaving early, quit blaming other people for the mess you got yourself into.

If I heal you you'll be expected to treat your wife like the queen I made her. If I heal you, you'll be expected to treat your man like the king I made him. If I heal you, you'll be expected to take your medicine, follow the doctors' orders, quit smoking, improve your vocabulary, write the paper, go back to school, get the degree, start the business, pay off your bills, get on a diet and stay on it.

If I heal you you'll be expected to pray more, give more, serve more, respect more, visit more, read more, be more of a role model, be kind, be polite.

“Are you ready for that change? Do you really want to get well?”
That's a question we may need to answer, as well. What do you want? The first step to something is to want it. Let me say that again. The first step to gaining something is to want it.

Desperation Illustration: The only monument in the world built in the shape of a bug, to honor a bug is located in Fort Rucker, Alabama. In 1915 the Mexican boll weevil invaded Southeast Alabama and destroyed 60% of the cotton crop. In desperation, the farmers turned to planting peanuts. By 1917 the peanut industry had become so profitable that the county harvested more peanuts than any other county in the nation. In gratitude, the people of the town erected a statue and inscribed these words:

"In profound appreciation of the boll weevil and what it has done as the herald of prosperity." The instrument of their suffering had become the means of their blessing.

Illustration: Drs. Frank Minirth and Paul Meier have written a book about overcoming depression entitled "*Happiness Is a Choice*." They wrote, as psychiatrists, we cringe whenever Christian patients use the words, 'I can't and I've tried'. Any good psychiatrist knows that 'I can't' and I've tried' are merely lame excuses. We insist that our patients stop saying 'can't' and say 'want' instead."

“They need to see what they are really doing, so we make them face up to it by saying, ‘I just won't get along with my wife.’ ‘My husband and I won't communicate.’ ‘I won't discipline my kids the way I should.’ ‘I can't find time to pray.’ ‘I won't stop gossiping.’

Drs. Frank Minirth and Paul Meier say that when they change their ‘cant's’ to ‘want's’ they stop avoiding the truth and start facing reality.”

We need to determine what we really want, and as God's people, learn to say with the apostle Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" [Philippians 4:13].

II. HE QUIT BLAMING OTHER PEOPLE

A second prerequisite for this man's healing was to quit blaming others for his problem. There was a local belief that the waters of Bethesda had healing powers. Some Biblical manuscripts read that “An angel of the Lord came down and stirred up the waters.” Earlier manuscripts did not contain that explanation and many scholars believe the stirring of the water was from an underground spring that would occasionally experience extreme pressure. Whatever caused the disturbance, the people believed that when the waters of Bethesda bubbled up, the first one in the water would be cured.

So when Jesus asked, “Do you want to get well?” the man replied, “Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me” [John 5:7].

He was complaining, “Every time the water bubbles up, no one is here to help me into the pool. It's always the stronger ones who reach the water first. It's a shame those of us who need it the most get the least amount of help. It's been that way for 38 years.” It's so easy to blame other people for our problems. That has been man's scapegoat from the beginning.

Illustration: When God asked Adam why he disobeyed, Adam explained, “The woman you gave me persuaded me to eat.”

Illustration: When Moses asked his brother Aaron why he permitted the Israelites to worship a golden calf, Aaron said, “The people pressured me to do something since you were gone so long, Moses. They wanted gods

like the Canaanites. I just threw their jewelry into the fire and out came the calf." Blame the people, blame Moses for taking so long, blame the Canaanites, blame the fire even! But don't blame me!

Illustration: When Pilate was forced to make a decision about Jesus, he said, "I wash my hands of this matter. Jesus is yours; do with Him as you please. But I'm innocent of this whole matter."

People do the same thing today. How often do we hear people say things like ("I'd stop drinking if my wife would quit nagging me! I'd work harder, but no one appreciates my effort and I'd make better grades, but my teacher doesn't like me.")

Illustration: King William of Potsdam once visited a prison in England. Every prisoner brought before him claimed to be innocent and pleaded for a pardon except for one man who admitted his guilt. King William said to the warden, "Get this guilty man out of the prison before he corrupts all these innocent men!" And the man was set free.

Application: We have such a difficult time saying, "I'm responsible." We blame heredity, environment, circumstances - everything. Yet what the Lord wants is for us to accept responsibility for our own behavior.

Romans 14:12 says, "Each of us will give an account of himself to God." Heredity and environment play a part in influencing us, but we can rise above that if we want to. Some of the world's best people had terrible pasts. Some of the most privileged people wind up being complete failures.

Application: Maybe it's time to quit blaming mom and dad or an ex-spouse or a relative who abused you in some way and say with the old spiritual, "It's me, it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer. Not my brother, not my sister, but it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer."

III. HE STRETCHED BEYOND HIMSELF

Jesus also motivated the lame man to stretch beyond himself. Versus 8 says, "Then Jesus said to him, 'Get up! Pick up your mat and walk'. At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

A. Jesus frequently required a dedicated effort on the part of a person requesting healing. Not always, but often, He required a response of faith before He would heal.

Illustration: He said to the ten lepers, “Go show yourself to the priests and as they went they were healed!” He said to the man with a withered hand, “Stretch forth your hand.” When the man made the effort, his hand was healed. Jesus put clay on the eyes of blind man and said, “Go wash in the pool of Siloam.” When he washed, he could see. Jesus said to this man, “Pick up your mat and walk.” This was not a test of his faith in Jesus because the lame man didn't know who Jesus was. It was a test of his resolve and of his willingness to make an effort to help himself. Jesus asked the man to attempt the one thing that he hadn't done for 38 years. When the man made the effort, he was healed at once.

B. Take notice of four characteristics about Christ's healing power. If you encounter someone who claims to have healing power today like that of Christ, measure his assertions against these Biblical truths.

1. Jesus' healing was instantaneous. It was never a gradual healing that took place later.

2. It was complete. You would expect someone who hadn't walked for 38 years to have wobbly legs or have to re-learn to walk. But he picked up his mat and walked. He was completely cured.

3. Jesus' miracles were undeniable. Skeptics couldn't say, “Nothing miraculous has happened. It's all psychosomatic.” High healings were usually very visible and undeniable.

4. It was reliable. Jesus never failed to heal anyone who asked Him.

C. But notice, in order for this man to be healed, he had to stretch... beyond himself. If we want to get well, there must be effort.

Illustration: One man told about a friend who has been in a wheelchair for 15 years. But his doctors say he could be walking today if he had made more effort in therapy when he was younger. Apparently, he didn't want to walk that much.

Illustration: Contrast that with Tony Melendez, who plays the guitar with his toes! Born with no arms, Tony shares with audiences what Jesus Christ means to his life and then skillfully plays the guitar with his bare feet. He's incredible! Can you imagine the tremendous amount of effort, frustration and determination it took to develop that skill?

D. Do you want to get well? How badly do you want it? Do you want it so intensely that you're willing to work long hours and endure pain? It may mean doing vigorous exercise and following a disciplined program. It may mean swallowing your pride.

It may mean getting up earlier to read the Bible or denying a golf game to attend a church function. It may mean that you quit wallowing in self-pity. It may mean saying "No" to pleasure or terminating a tempting relationship.

I'm asking you to get up and walk with me. Jesus is asking us to walk with him. Jesus is asking us to wade in the water... to dive into the rich hope and promise that Jesus has for us to live lives of health and wholeness - both as individuals and as a community. Do you want to be well? Really? Do you want to be healed? Really? Are you ready to leave behind the familiar and crushing habits and addictions of life and the prejudices and institutions that are weighing you down and crippling you? Jesus is reaching out to you ... to me To Robeson County and asking, Do you want to be well? And he is inviting us and commanding us ...to get up and walk...Get up and walk. Let's do that ... Let's go for a walk with Jesus. You've received your invitation. I pray that you'll say yes. **Amen**