

Do You Want to Get Well?

John 5:1-18

Call: Isa 35:3-6 (Msg)

Scripture: Mark 2:23-28 (ESV)

I. Introduction

Today, we come to chapter 5 of John which means we've finished chapter 4. And, this is a major break in the book. As I said last week, Chapters 2-4 are almost a self-contained unit, from Cana to Cana. Now, we come to chapter 5 and things begin to take a bit of a shift. Instead of the focus being solely on signs, the focus shifts to the teaching that accompanies the signs. Chapters 5-11, the heart of the Gospel, see Jesus continue to do signs, but he accompanies these signs with deeper teaching about himself which explain the signs.

Two other notes will help us as we enter into this section:

- First of all, during these middle chapters, John is careful to tell us that Jesus does his signs in the midst of the worship life of 1st century Judaism. His signs and teachings occur during the Jewish feasts. We'll talk more about it as we go. But, by understanding the meaning and background of the feasts, Jesus' words and actions make more sense.
- Secondly, it is during these chapters of John, when Jesus sets himself apart from every other religious leader that has ever lived. In our pluralistic society, we typically hear from university professors and talk show hosts that all major religions are basically the same, and that all major religious leaders have said and done the same kinds of things throughout history. When I hear those sorts of comments, I know the person hasn't read these middle chapters of John. Or if they have, they've dismissed them as untrue. Because as we will see, what Jesus says and does during these middle chapters of John puts him in a class all by himself.
 - As far as actions, he will heal a man who has been lame for 38 years, our text today. He will feed 5000 men with just 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. He will give sight to a man born blind and he will call a dead man out of a tomb after he has been dead for four days.
 - As far as words, it is in these middle chapters of John where Jesus will say things like:
 - "I am the bread of life,"*
 - "They who eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day,"*
 - "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink and from his innermost being will flow rivers of living water,"*
 - "I am the light of the world, follow me and you will not walk in darkness,"*
 - "Before Abraham was, I am,"*
 - "I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me will never die,"*

Have you ever heard anyone speak like this? No, because no one has ever spoken like this. In fact in chapter 7, one man will be sent to arrest Jesus, and he'll come back without Jesus and why? Because as he says, *"Never has a man ever spoken the way this man speaks"* (John 7:46).

In these chapters, Jesus sets himself apart from every person who has ever lived.

So, I invite you into our text this morning, chapter 5, verse 1.

II. The Setting (1-5)

1 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 called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. 3 In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. 5 One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. (ESV)

A. Verse 4?

Now, if you look at our text, you'll see that the text jumps from verse 3 to verse 5. That's not a different way of counting. Verse 4 is not in the earliest and best manuscripts. It says these people are, *"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"* (ESV notes). Evidently, this was the superstition surrounding this pool, almost certainly added later by scribes to explain the situation.

B. The Pool

John gives a remarkable number of details about this particular pool, showing he has intimate knowledge of Jerusalem at this time. What is interesting is this pool wasn't discovered until the late 1800's, and not identified until the late 1900's. So, up until that point, people thought John's geography was quite questionable. It turns out John knew what he was talking about.

C. The Time and Place

We're not sure how long after the healing of the official's son in chapter 4 that Jesus goes to Jerusalem to this unnamed feast. The point is that we are back in Jerusalem after being in Galilee for a significant period of time. And, note, Jesus doesn't go to the Temple or to a palace. He goes to the shadow of the Temple, to a place of desperation and need. In other words, he doesn't go to the White House. He goes to a homeless encampment on Pennsylvania Avenue. It seems the living God has a special place in his heart for the hurting and needy.

Which means, if we want to follow Jesus, it means we follow him into places of need. We follow him into places of desperation. We follow him into hospitals and homeless camps and food banks. And, when we do, our heart begins beating with his heart as we get shaped into Christlikeness. We get turned right-side up when we focus on the other and not ourselves.

So, where are you following him into places of need? Of course, right now it is harder to get out and about, but I want to highlight one of our families, Martin and Gail Nordby, who have begun leading a food distribution site for 2nd Harvest in south San Jose. They distribute food to about 725 needy families every Monday, and they could use help every week. You could join them in following Jesus into that place of need.

D. The Focus

Out of the multitude at this pool, the story focuses on one man, who has been lame for 38 years, longer than most people lived in antiquity. Why this one man? We're not told, but maybe he's the neediest? We're not told. Some people see a significance in the number 38. I don't think so, other than it points out how hopeless this man is.

III. The Healing (6-9)

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.

A. The Question

Jesus walks by the pool, notices this one man and knows his story. Like the woman at the well, he is on a mission for this hurting man. And, he asks him a question.

"Do you want to be healed? Do you want to get well?" Getting well or getting healed is the key word in our text. It means to be made physically well. But in most cases, it also signifies a much more holistic wellness, both physically and spiritually. In chapter 7, Jesus seems to refer back to this event by saying that he healed this man completely (John 7:23).

But, it's a bit of an odd question isn't it? Of course, the man wants to get well, doesn't he? Or, maybe not. If he gets well, he'll have to change. He'll have to get a job. And, that means working and worrying. But also, when you are chronically ill, people tend to give you a lot of latitude. But, when you aren't sick, you typically won't get the same grace. So, he'll most likely have to change his attitude if he is gets well.

B. The Response

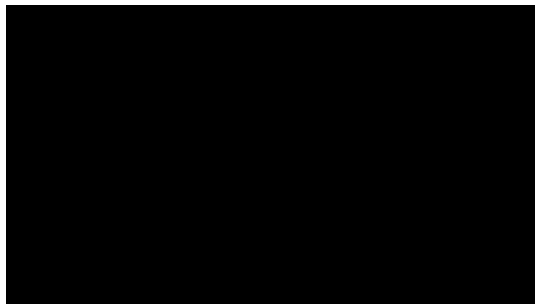
The man responds. He respectfully calls Jesus sir, but he doesn't answer the question does he? He seems to complain in self-absorption, providing excuses for why he is still sick. He is completely focused on his helplessness. As Bruce Milne says, "This man is locked up inside his need." Now, I don't want to judge this man too harshly, because I've never been lame for 38 years. But, I think John gives us this exchange for a reason. And, as we hear the rest of the story, I think the man does portray a certain character flaw, one commentator says, a "persistent dullness" (Bruner, 308).

But, I think it's worth asking ourselves this question. Do we want to get well? Do we want to function better in life? I think many times when we consider this question, we answer a lot like this invalid. We offer excuses and justifications for our struggles and our shortcomings. Shawn – do you want to get well? Well, Jesus, sir, there's no one around to help me. No, Shawn – do you want to function better? Well, Jesus, sir, um, well, it's just that I'm so busy. No, Shawn – do you want to function better? Well, Jesus, sir, it's just that you made me this way. We offer excuses and justifications as to why we don't want to change. Jesus stands at the door and knocks, offering us wellness and a life to the full, and instead of trusting Him, we choose to place our trust in curious things like ourselves, money, or other people. One writer calls this the "mystery of resistance" (Johnson, 13). The Word of life stands before us, and we resist Him because in the end, we'll have to change. Fundamentally, we'll have to stop being so self-absorbed, being in control. And, we'll have to surrender lordship to him and surrender is hard. Do you want to get well?

C. The Commands

But, Jesus is not put off by this man's complaints and half-hearted excuses. In sheer grace, he speaks but a word, actually 7 words in the Greek, and the lame man leaps like a deer. Amazing! The man who had been lame for 38 years gets up and walks - immediately.

For those of you who have had broken legs, you'll know it takes a long, long time to return to walking. It simply doesn't happen overnight. Yet, this man immediately gets up and walks. It's extraordinary!



D. The Sabbath

But, verse 9, it's the Sabbath. Uh-oh. This is why the feast is not named because John wants us to focus on the Sabbath. And, it is because it is the Sabbath that Jesus will now enter into an intense debate with the Religious authorities over the rest of the chapter. Presidential debates are nothing compared to the rest of this chapter (although it is more of a monologue than debate).

As you know, the Sabbath is the great weekly feast for the Jewish people. The celebration of the Sabbath is at the very heart of the worship life of 1st century Judaism, and maybe *the* most important badge of identity for Jewish people in the first century. It is simply impossible to over-emphasize the importance of the Sabbath to a 1st century Jew.

As you know, nobody made up the Sabbath. The Sabbath is grounded in the 4th commandment from God, which in turn is grounded in the creation story in Genesis. And, by the first century, this command received the most focus from the religious leaders. Why? Because many of the leaders were convinced that *everything* that was wrong in Israel was due to people not keeping the Sabbath. So, these leaders were hyper-sensitive to keeping the Sabbath. So much so, they came up with a list of 1521 specific actions which were not allowed on the Sabbath. They built a fence around the Sabbath, enclosing it within the burden of legalism. But the Sabbath was never about passivity and not working, the Sabbath was about making time holy in restfulness.

Although the Jewish leaders took it in a wrong direction, we should not be so quick to dismiss their sensitivities. The Sabbath “is made for man” and *is* a great gift for us (Mark 2:27). It is a gift that reorients our focus onto God, revitalizes the flourishing life of God in us and restores the joy of our salvation, if we receive the gift. Now, I know I’m treading on controversial ground here, but I want to share how great a gift the Sabbath can be for us.

The Sabbath *is* built into creation, meaning built into our physical world and our physical bodies. (I often wonder if the creation is in crisis because we are not living a Sabbath.) In other words, taking a 6+1 view of our week is not an imposition on us. It is an exposition of how we are made in his image. We are made for this. You could say that a 6+1 view of life is the manufacturer’s specifications for how we function best. It is how we flourish as image-bearers. Here in the west, our pace of life is a violation of creation. And, we pay a hefty price physically, emotionally and spiritually by not living according to the manufacturer’s specifications. Some people have said that if we in the west would obey these specifications, we would put many doctors and psychologists out of business.

But, it is also the most powerful way to individually push back against the rise of secularization in our world. Secularization is the removal of God from society. When we take a Sabbath breath, moment or day, we are pushing back against the removal of God from society. Otherwise, if we are too busy to focus on the living God for just 24 hours, it means we know who really rules the world. To put it another way, when followers of Jesus do not take seriously at least 24 hours off from producing in a week (not that they have to be contiguous hours), it means they have forgotten or no longer believe that God reigns. It means we think we have to keep working and keep producing because we are in control, and are holding the world together. As Eugene Peterson said, “If you cannot afford to take one day a week for rest, you are taking yourself too seriously” (Peterson, 294). Many people in this valley are taking themselves too seriously.

And, where do we go to find true rest? Jesus invites us to him, as Lord of the Sabbath. If we are weary and burdened, he will make us well by resting us (Matt 11:29). Ultimately, it is in him where we find our rest.

There is so much more to say, but this week, I encourage you to give yourself the gift of a Sabbath, if not 24 contiguous hours, maybe multiple Sabbath moments, even Sabbath breaths for reorientation, revitalization and restoration.

IV. The Rebuke (10-13)

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. (ESV)

A. The Rebuke

John refers again here to "the Jews." And, here, he is speaking of the religious leaders who will oppose Jesus. This group finds the man and rebukes him for carrying his pallet. According to these authorities, it is not permissible to carry things on the Sabbath.

I'm always amazed at this point. Jesus heals a man lame for 38 years and all the religious leaders see is a broken rule. They see a broken rule, not a miracle of a man being healed.

B. The Man Doesn't Know

But, the man doesn't even know who Jesus is, and Jesus shows his mysterious elusiveness and slips away.

V. The Confrontation (14-18)

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. 17 But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." 18 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. (ESV)

A. The Command

After another undisclosed amount of time, Jesus *finds* the man in the temple, suggesting it is not a chance encounter. The man is probably in the Temple because being lame would have prohibited him from going to the Temple. But, now, he can go. What is curious is the man doesn't even thank Jesus! Where is his thanks?

Jesus tells the man to sin no more. We saw grace, and here's the truth. He is probably alluding to his disability resulting from some sin in his life. Now, we need to be careful here. Not all sickness and suffering is a direct result of an individual's sin. Job would be an example of that. But, sickness and suffering *can be* a direct result of sin. Jesus can make that connection as the creator, but we must be very careful of making any kind of connection in someone's life. Remember Job's friends tried to make that connection and failed. They were true friends when they stopped talking and simply were present with Job.

B. The “Prosecution”

At this point, the man finds the authorities and tells them Jesus healed him. The authorities in turn, begin to persecute Jesus. This word for persecuting can also be translated prosecuting. In other words, the Religious authorities begin bringing legal proceedings against Jesus that will eventually result in his crucifixion. And, why? Because of what he did on the Sabbath.

C. The Anger?

But, why are the religious authorities so angry? Well, essentially, these leaders are wrestling with two basic questions in this text.

1. The first one revolves around man working on the Sabbath? What is prohibited and what is legal? A question that as we already said, misses the heart of the commandment. Not working is not the primary issue. Keeping the day holy is the primary issue.
2. The second question, which is far more important, is – does God work on the Sabbath? And, if he works, what kind of work does he do? Most Jewish leaders held that God is always working, sustaining the world moment by moment. Were God to stop working, everything would collapse into utter chaos.

From, man’s perspective, this work was visible in three ways, as one Rabbi says: “God has kept in his hands three keys which he entrusts to no one else:

- a. The key of rain.
- b. The key of birth.
- c. And, the key of the resurrection of the dead” (Brown, 217).

And, it was clear to everyone that he used these three keys on the Sabbath, because on the Sabbath it may rain; on the Sabbath, a birth may happen: and on the Sabbath someone may die. Therefore, when Genesis says that God rested on the Sabbath, it does not mean he did nothing. He continued to work, sustaining the universe, and obviously, part of that which was visible, using the three keys.

D. Jesus’ Justification

Then Jesus comes along. The authorities aren’t necessarily upset about the healing. Although Jesus did tell the man to take up his bed and walk – which is expressly prohibited on the Sabbath – what really angers the authorities is Jesus’ justification for his actions: *“My father is working until now, and I am working”* (v 17). Those words got Jesus crucified.

Now the authorities would agree with part of Jesus’ claim that the father is working, as we said, sustaining the universe. But, Jesus doesn’t say *the* father or *our* father, he says, *“My Father.”* Jesus is emphasizing his unique relationship with God, which will be the theme of the upcoming debate (it’s actually more like a monologue). But then he says, *“and I, myself, am working.”* Whoa. Jesus is claiming divinity authority here. He is claiming to work together with His Father, and in this context, doing on the Sabbath what only God the father does. He is claiming the right to use the keys as God uses the keys.

And, that is why the religious authorities are so angry with him. They had to do something. These words are too big to ignore – “*equality with God*”? That cannot be ignored. I’m surprised he wasn’t crucified on the spot. And, the next two weeks we will watch as Jesus unpacks what “*equality with God*” really means.

For now, I’d like to close with a reflection on these words –

VI. Reflection

“*My father is working until now, and I am working.*” No one in the history of the world ever spoke this way. And, they are working as we said, sustaining the universe, and a primary part of that from our story today is their work of bringing life and making alive, out of love and sheer grace.

As Irenaeus said so long ago, “They are [in the business] of making humans fully alive” not only on the Sabbath but everyday. Out of sheer grace, they are working to make all of us stand up fully alive in Christ. They are at work bringing life in the midst of all the need and bringing light in the midst of all the darkness. And, it’s all sheer grace. The man in our story did nothing to deserve healing. And, neither do we. But, out of sheer grace, Jesus brings abundant life to him and to us. He makes *well* happen. Jesus and his father are in the business of transforming us into fully alive humans, looking like Jesus, functioning in all the ways that imitate Jesus.

- They desire for you to “*get up, take up your bed, and walk*” knowing you are forgiven from all those skeletons in your closet.
- They desire for you to “*get up, take up your bed, and walk,*” in freedom from the addictions that enslave you.
- They desire for you to “*get up, take up your bed, and walk,*” with their strength to reconcile broken relationships.
- They desire for you to “*get up, take up your bed, and walk*” in your love for the other because they first loved you.
- They desire for you to “*get up, take up your bed, and walk,*” finding rest and contentment in Jesus.
- They desire for you to “*get up, take up your bed, and walk,*” restored in the joy of your salvation.

Jesus and the Father are working even until now to make you stand up fully alive in Jesus, empowered by the Spirit. And he who began a good work in you will not give up on you. He who began a good work in you will never say, “Oh I see you did that again.” He who began a good work in you will not abandon you. In fact, out of sheer grace, “*I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion*” (Phil 1:6). That’s the good news. And, that’s sheer grace. Sheer grace is our only hope. And, the question is, “Do You Really Want to Get Well?”

Amen.

VII. Benediction

If you would like prayer this morning with our prayer team through zoom, you can find the zoom link in the e-newsletter.

Now receive this benediction from Heb 13:

"Now may the God who is in the business of making well and making all things whole, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Resources

Brown, Raymond, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*

Bruner, Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*

Croasmun, Matthew, *Let Me Ask You a Question: Conversations with Jesus*

Johnson, Darrell, *Jesus the Healer*

Johnson, Darrell, *Preaching the Gospel According to John* (Regent College Course)

Klink, Edward, *John* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)

Peterson, Eugene, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*