

"The One Who Never Rests"
(John 5:1-15)
Pastor Peter Yi
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Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. 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 Jewish leaders 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 Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

First, the title was meant to include verse 16-18, which has Jesus discussing the Sabbath with the Jewish teachers, but in my preparation, I stopped at verse 15, where the Sabbath discussion doesn't yet come up. So, I guess a better title for the sermon is, "Are You Truly Saved?"

Well, for the second week in a row we are looking at a story of Jesus healing a man who was lame. In both of these stories the men were healed by Jesus, but the similarities end there. In fact, the two stories could not be more different. You'll notice some of the differences later in this sermon, but for now, let's look at this story a bit more carefully. What I'd like to do today is to walk through this passage with you, to understand what is happening, and then to draw out some implications or applications from it, so let's dive in.

Jesus went up to Jerusalem to attend one of the Jewish festivals. Near the Sheet Gate there was a pool and a great number of disabled people gathered there. There were the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. That's the backdrop -- the setting for what's about to happen. The story then focuses in on one particular man. Verse 5 tells us that he was ill or invalid for thirty-eight years. Though the word is a general word for ill or sick, we see in the next several verses what his issue was. He was paralyzed, unable to move. Day after day he laid on his mat, hoping to enter the pool.

Jesus sees the man and it came to his knowledge that the man had been in this condition for a very long time. So, he asks the man, "Do you want to get well?" This is very similar to when he approached a blind man named Bartimaeus in the gospel of Mark chapter 10, where he asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus answers, "I want to see." And Jesus heals him.

But, here's where the conversation becomes very interesting. Look at how the sick man responds. What's very peculiar is what he doesn't say. What would you expect him to say? Knowing what we know about Jesus up to this point of John's gospel, what would you expect him to say? "Yes!" "There's nothing more I'd like than to walk again." Now, let's not jump to conclusions and blame the man, at least not yet. Perhaps he had not yet heard of Jesus, or he's never met Jesus and doesn't know what Jesus looks like. But it's not as if he doesn't believe in the supernatural. He does. He believes in the miraculous. We see that in his response.

"Sir," he says, "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." So he believed he could have received some kind of supernatural healing. I think most people are like that. If we offer to pray for them they'll appreciate it. They might even come to us and ask us to pray knowing we are Christians. This assumes a belief in the supernatural. Or if a person is really in a desperate situation, they'll bow their head and begin talking to God, asking for his help.

Excursus: Textual Criticism

Now, in your NIV translations and ESV and actually all modern English translation have a verse missing. It jumps from verse 3 to verse 5. Where's verse 4? On the bottom of that page there should be a footnote that shows us what verse 4 is. "From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease they had." There's another even bigger example of verses that are removed and that's the ending of Mark where a huge chunk of verses are removed. And there are a few other passages like that in the New Testament. So why do some translations like the King James or the New King James contain that verse but the rest do not? Well, the answer is because of a study called "textual criticism." What is textual criticism. It's the discipline or study of trying to find the original text, especially when there are variant readings of the text. So let's say that there are 300 ancient copies of John chapter 5. I'm not sure exactly how many copies we have, but let's just stick with 300. Of those 300, 150 contain verse 4 and 150 do not contain verse 4. How do you know which one is more reliable? Textual criticism. Here are some of the rules of textual criticism. The older the manuscript the more weight is given to it. That makes sense, doesn't it? The closer it is to the location of the original writing, the more weight is given to it. The more difficult the reading, the more weight is given to it.

All that to say that verse 4 was removed because there was not enough textual criticism evidence to keep it in. If you want to know more about it, I can point you to some resources. Speak to me afterwards.

Back to the story:

In the man's response we can see that he believed that there was some innate power in the water that could heal him. He mentions that the waters were stirred. Scholars say that the pool was likely spring fed and that the springs must have gushed from time to time, causing a disturbance in the water, and so people must have thought that there was some medicinal or healing properties in the water. Perhaps the belief in the day was that the first one in received some sort of healing. You might think that this is so primitive, an example of uneducated, non-scientific people. But in actuality the people back then are not much different from people today. Don't people today search out spas and springs and natural mud pits, claiming there's healing there? So we shouldn't be too quick to look down on this man.

Jesus then says to the man, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." Then immediately the man was cured, he picked up the mat and began to walk. He had no choice but to be healed and get up. Just like the resurrection of Lazarus. He too had no choice, but to start breathing again and to come out of his grave. Jesus here displays his sovereign power and the authority of his word. When he commands, it will happen.

The author then tells us that the miracle took place on the Sabbath. The religious police see this man walking and carrying his mat and they slam down the law on this man. "The law forbids you to carry your mat." Well, does it really say that? Is there an actual command in the Old Testament that forbids a person from carry their mat on the Sabbath day? Here's how the Sabbath law reads.

⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.
(Exodus 20:9–10)

There are other prohibitions on the Sabbath related to kitchen work. No cooking, no lighting fires. No food gathering. So the rule was basically for God's people to cease from regular work, from your normal work and to rest and worship. But to be more specific the religious leaders of the day had come up with thirty-nine kinds of work that were forbidden on the Sabbath, which included carrying anything from one area to another.

The man replied by saying (v11), "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" He doesn't take responsibility for his violation; rather, he blames Jesus, saying, "I only did what that guy told me to do." It seems nothing more than trying not to get in any kind of trouble, so he shifts the blame to Jesus. Once again, what is interesting is what is not said to the religious leaders. He only mentions, "the man who made me well", he doesn't celebrate his healing, but says only what will keep him from getting in any trouble. Something is not right about his response.

Then the Jewish leaders determine to chase down the lead and find Jesus. In the meantime Jesus finds the healed man at the temple and says to him, "See, you are well again." Or something like, "Look you've become well." But what he says next is very surprising. "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." This is the first time in John's gospel that the word sin is mentioned. What were his sins of which he should stop sinning? All of them. The sin of unbelief. The sin of ungratefulness. The sin of not adoring his healer, his savior. The sin of betraying Jesus. The sin passing the blame to Jesus. Now, this is where the story ends.

Three Implications

1. You can want, ask and even receive something from Jesus and still not be saved.

There is nothing in this story that indicates that the man became a Christian, that is, place his faith in Jesus. In fact verse 15 tells us that he isn't. Let's compare it with others that we've seen in John's gospel. John the Baptist. John says, "Look, Behold, the Lamb of God!" What was his response to his disciples leaving him and going to Jesus? He basically says, "And that's why I came, so that Jesus would increase, and I would decrease."

Nathaniel after his encounter with Jesus professes, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

After the disciples witnessed the water turning into wine, the author tells us, "And his disciples believed in him."

We know that even Nicodemus, the Pharisee in chapter 3, eventually believed in Jesus.

How about the Samaritan woman at the well. After her encounter with Jesus, do you remember what she did? She left her water jug, ran back into town and told everyone what had just happened. "I think I just met the Messiah. He told me everything about me. Come, you have to meet him!" And the woman and the townspeople believed in Jesus because of her testimony.

And then, at the end of chapter 4, a man's dying son was healed and here's how John reports the response. "Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." so, he and his whole household believed" (53).

Here's what blaringly absent from this story. It's the word "believe." The Gospel of John uses the word 'believe' more than any other book in the entire bible. In fact the word appears 99 times. The goal of this gospel is stated in John 20:30-31:

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

The word 'believe' is found practically everywhere in the gospel...except here!

In the passage that we looked at last week in Mark 2, Jesus saw their faith. But there is no faith here. What's the point? The point is this. You can want, ask and even receive something, some blessing, some gift, some healing from Jesus and still not be saved. You can want the blessing more than the one who blesses. You can want the gift more than you want the one who gives the gift. And if you do, you would not be saved. Do you want to have a boyfriend or girlfriend more than Jesus? Do you want your children to be successful more than you want them to know Jesus? Do you want to get your dream job more than you want Jesus? Do you want your sin, more than you want Jesus? Then you would not be saved.

Listen to these verses from Matthew 7, in the Sermon on the Mount. They might be the most frightening verses in the Bible.

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ (**Matthew 7:21–23**)

These are terrifying words and they serve as a warning not to equate receiving or experiencing some blessing from God as a sure indicator that you are saved.

2. Second implication. You as an individual or we as a church can begin to think and then to act that the temporal and physical well-being of people is more important than the eternal salvation of their souls. It’s true. That’s what the liberal church thinks. Social programs, that’s what we need. Feed the poor, get involved in politics, and provide affordable housing; that’s what’s really important. That’s what even some Pentecostals think. They think that physical healing is more important than eternal salvation. I’ve seen that with many Pentecostal and prosperity gospel preachers. Friends, the care of the poor and needy is in fact part and parcel of the church’s ministry, but it isn’t the primary part. Then what is the primary mission of the church? Go and make disciples, which means, go and share the gospel, go preach the gospel. Go preach repentance and faith in Jesus.

Yes, our church has an orphanage in Cambodia. We build homes for poor families in Mexico. We take donations for disaster relief. That’s why we tutor and run children’s programs. And countless other humanitarian things, but those things are never our primary goals.

3. This could be a case where the man’s sin or sins was tied to his illness. Jesus tells the man, “Stop sinning lest something worse happens to you.” Those words seem to imply that his sin and his sickness were intertwined. Here’s what commentary J. Ramsay Michaels says, “the man Jesus healed is supposed to understand that “Look, you have gotten well” is equivalent to “Look, your sins are forgiven.” Or if he does not understand it, at least the reader is expected to. Either way, the warning follows as a logical corollary.

Now we must be very careful here. Please listen carefully. Every illness and sickness and disease and eventually death is the result of the fall; it’s the result of Adam’s sin. Because of Adam’s sin, sickness and death entered the world. So that’s an overarching biblical understanding we must have. However, not all sickness and tragedy is a direct result of the person’s sin. Our classic example is Job. The story tells us he was a blameless man, yet he was one of the greatest sufferers in the entire bible. Later in John’s gospel we’ll find a man that was born blind and the disciples ask, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that this man was born this way?” To which Jesus answers, “Neither, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

But, there are times when sickness or tragedy is directly associated with or is the result of sin. Consider the frightful example of Ananias and his wife Sapphira. Do you remember their story? Because they lied to the leaders of the church, which was the same as lying to the Holy Spirit, they were struck dead. Or what about 1 Corinthians 11 where Paul rebukes the church for their improper administration of the Lord’s Supper as being the very reason for the weakness and sickness and death in some of their members (1 Corinthians 11:30). God possesses every right to punish us for our sins. The wonder is that we are not punished anywhere near what we deserve.

What does that mean for us? Be very slow to connect sickness to sin, especially with others, but even when looking at your own situation. Seek the Lord; ask the Holy Spirit, and if it is so, he will reveal it to you, and even if he doesn't, the Christian continues to live their lives in complete surrender to Christ and his Lordship. We are continuously looking inward, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal our sin, so we might confess it.

Friends, church, Jesus came that he might be supreme in our lives, that we would find our joy in Him. Go to Him not merely for the benefits, or you may lose everything. Rather, go to Him for Him and you'll get everything else thrown in. That's what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you as well. Trust in him today.

Let's pray.