



John 5:1-15
So That You May Believe: John
“Do You Want To Get Well?”

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For the last couple months we’ve been working our way through the gospel of John, with a brief pause around Palm Sunday and Easter, and also last week with youth Sunday. Didn’t they do a fantastic job last Sunday – from greeting us at the door to leading all facets of the worship service? 😊

Sometimes, you go to the store, and you’re shopping for stuff that you know you need. You’re out of milk, so you go to the store, and you buy milk. Other times, you’re shopping and you end up buying things that you had no idea you needed, but it turns out you desperately needed them. For instance, you get the milk you know that you need, but because you’re shopping at Costco, you also come home with a whole car full of stuff including lasagna, 20 pounds of chicken, a package of socks, a lawnmower, and a new 75-inch television. You didn’t know you needed those things, but golly: it turns out you do. Desperately. Especially the television. Now, I’m being facetious about our “need” for a 75-inch television, but hopefully you get the point.

In the last 3 Sundays in our series, we looked at two different people who were like this. The woman at the well just wanted to get a drink of water, but Jesus had something significantly more to offer that she needed. It didn’t take her long to realize her need for Jesus, but she sure didn’t at first. After that Jesus is approached by a guy who is desperate for Jesus to heal his son. But there’s a deeper healing that he needs in his own life, and he also ends up believing in Jesus, along with his household. Like going to the store, they wanted one thing...they engage with Jesus over something they know they need, but there’s a deeper need they have that Jesus can fill, and they aren’t aware of that need when they first encounter him. Similarly: **Sometimes we see our need for Jesus, and other times we don’t. Either way, he offers what we need.**

Today we encounter a third person who’s also desperate for Jesus, and like the others, there’s a deeper need that he has, that he doesn’t recognize he has. Let’s turn to **John 5:1-15** to look at one more person who has a deep need for Jesus, and who *doesn’t* realize it.

John tells us that after being in the region of Galilee, where we'd seen him in the last half of chapter 4, he returns to Jerusalem. Then he gives us some information about the location of the event he wants to then talk about.

There's a pool near a gate into the city of Jerusalem, and the gate is called the "sheep gate." This particular entrance through the Jerusalem wall was near the temple, and it was called the "sheep gate" because this is the entrance that was used for sheep coming in to the city to be sacrificed in the temple. So, it was a good gate to go through on your way to the temple – unless you were a sheep. Not only was this entrance to the city near the Temple, it was also near a pool called the pool of Bethesda. "Bethesda" comes from a combination of a couple Aramaic words (Aramaic was the everyday language at the time) that mean, "house of mercy." And that fits this pool because of the healings that apparently happened at it. It was a place of mercy for those who were sick or injured, and so forth.

Now, archaeologists unearthed this pool (not that it's completely intact – it wouldn't hold water now!) in the 19th century. Based on what they've discovered, a model of this part of the city in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem¹ shows the pool looking like this **(Photo)**:

The actual pool was a little over 300 feet long. So, it was pretty good-sized. On the very left edge of the photo, near the top corner, you can see the gate, with the pool shown here with a red tile roof around its outer walls. And you can see here why it is said to have "five colored colonnades" – colonnades are basically just covered walkways



around the edge of the pool – ...and you can see why it says there are five of them, because it really is like two pools with connected walls running the length of the two of them, with one dividing colonnade going between the two pools. One pool was physically higher than the other, and water flowed down from it into the other. The temple is out of this picture to the left just a bit.

So, this is where today's events happened. It's a real pool, near a real gate, in Jerusalem, that existed for centuries and has been unearthed by archaeologists. And the belief at the time of today's events, was that when the water got stirred up – probably there was a natural spring that ran under it and would occasionally bubble up, kind of like how a geyser will occasionally spout off...though in the case of the pool it would not have been that explosive...and: **When it bubbled up, it was thought to have healing powers.** And apparently, some people actually did get healed and those healings seemed attributable to the pool, or that belief would not have existed. There was a certain degree of superstition wrapped around it, that you had to be the first one into the pool in order to receive the healing, and they also believed that the waters were stirred up not by some natural hydrological phenomena, but that an angel stirred up the waters.

Gathered around this pool would be people with various kinds of ailments and disabilities, waiting to be the first in the pool after the water was stirred up, so as to be healed. And so, Jesus comes there and meets this guy who's been an "invalid" as it's translated, for 38 years. As one commentator noted, if he got his illness in his childhood, he would now be like 45-50 years old or so, which would make him an old man. I stopped reading that commentary at that point. Just kidding. 😊 We don't know exactly what his condition is, but clearly, he has trouble moving quickly – perhaps he has some paralysis or something along those lines that makes it difficult for him to get in the water quickly.

Jesus asks him a question that might at first strike us as odd: "Do you want to get well?" We'll come back to that in a moment. But based on the guy's response, you wonder if Jesus senses something about him that made it a particularly valid question, because the guy doesn't just say "Yes" or "no" but instead gives an answer that blames others for him not being able to get into the water: no one will help him. We get the sense that he's a bit of a complainer and a blamer. Maybe he had asked for help, and maybe he hadn't. Who knows? One thing I do know is that complainers and blamers are people who are hard to help. When someone has the mentality that their problem is the fault of other people, it can be tough to help.

Jesus, however, is not deterred, and he simply tells the man to stand up, take his mat, and walk. And he does. The guy is healed by Jesus right then and there. The end of verse 9 tells us that the day on which this happened was the Sabbath, and the next three verses deal with that. That topic gets picked up again in the passage we'll look at next week, so we'll gloss over this Sabbath issue for now.

But he's asked by some Jewish leaders who told him to pick up his mat and carry it, and the guy doesn't know. He never found out who healed him. He didn't know it was Jesus who had healed him. John tells us that Jesus slipped away into the crowd and that's why he didn't find out. However, they bump into each other a bit later, and Jesus says to him, "See, you're still healed. Stop sinning, or something worse may happen to you." And then the guy goes and tells the religious leaders that it was Jesus who healed him.

So, I want to focus on this last statement of Jesus' in light of the question that he asked the man earlier. There's a connection between this statement of Jesus' about his sin, and his opening question of the man: "Do you want to get well?" I'm not so sure that the healing this guy really needed was actually physical. Yes, he needed that. But there's something deeper going on that needed healing as well. Maybe it was connected to his physical ailment in some way or maybe it wasn't.

All we know for certain in regards to this is that the sin in his life has greater consequences than the consequences from the ailment that Jesus healed. Jesus makes that clear. Is this guy thinking about that when he was by the pool or as he walks around town as a physically healed guy? Probably not. But Jesus makes it clear that whatever the sin is that Jesus is speaking about, the consequences of it are greater than what the guy faced in his physical ailment. And so, Jesus simply tells him to stop sinning. That's it. Just stop. Don't give in to the temptation. Don't live in this way that's contrary to God's Word. Given that Jesus doesn't identify what the sin is, you get the idea that they both know what it is. The guy knows what Jesus is talking about – Jesus doesn't need to explain. And Jesus' word to him is "stop sinning."

Now, most of us here are probably aware that later, Jesus would die on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. But that does not give us the right to just keep persisting in sin because we know that God will forgive us. This is addressed in a few places elsewhere in Scripture, but the Apostle Paul maybe puts it the most bluntly in Romans 6:1-2, **“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (Romans 6:1-2).**

So, yes, God forgives us, but that’s not a license to just keep persisting in sin, even though yes: God will continue to forgive us and pour out his grace. Instead, as Jesus says here: Stop sinning. Jesus asks, “Do you want to get well?” The right answer is “yes” and then Jesus heals us, and the next step is: then, stop sinning. **Jesus’ question and his statement go hand in hand.** The hard part is: some people really like the sin in their lives. Some people don’t want to be healed from it. They’re comfortable with it, they like the attention it gives them, they like the power it gives them, they like the way it makes them feel... There are a host of reasons. But the end result is the same: They want to embrace it and live into it and normalize it, and say that it’s ok. We see that in our world in a number of ways:

- **The culture of the world is completely going that way in regards to sex and sexual relations.** Scripture is clear from cover to cover – including teachings from Jesus and the rest of the New Testament – that God has designed sexual intimacy to be between a man and woman in the covenant of marriage; but the world has pretty much embraced an “anything goes” sexual ethic. There was an article recently about a Japanese man who “married” a hologram of a fictitious character from some video games. It’s considered a “fictosexual” relationship. (Yes, that’s a “thing” and no, don’t ask me about it!) The “wedding” was in 2019. Recently he was in the news again, because the tech company that makes the software (Artificial Intelligence) for the hologram is no longer supported, and the hologram no longer works. We really live in an “anything goes” world.
- **Or what about the culture of the world in regards to income and wealth?** In a recent article from Relevant, a Christian online magazine that focuses on the intersection of faith and culture, they shared some analysis of some Pew Research Center data. Here’s one point from the

article about American wealth (savings, home ownership, etc.): **“The median upper-income family (those who make more than \$127,600) now holds 75 times the wealth of the median low-income family (those who make less than \$42,500), according to an analysis of the data by the Pew Research Center.”**² 20 years ago, the gap was a multiple of 31. And that’s not even considering that there are people in parts of the world that live their entire lives on a few dollars a month, in conditions that are worse than any of us would experience on a two-week backpacking trip in the Cascade mountains. Now wealth in and of itself is not sinful, but greed, materialism, pride, judgmentalism, idolatry...these things are all wrapped up in this topic of wealth – and those are all things the Bible calls sin. But the world pretty much endorses them: People don’t want to get well.

Jesus’ word to us on these kinds of things – and we could keep going down the list with other sins as well...**Jesus’ message to us in regards to the sin in our life is: “stop sinning, or something worse will happen to you.”** When we engage in sinful behavior, and have a mindset that it’s “not all that bad,”...when we continue in it, and endorse it, and embrace it rather than hating it and stopping it, it leads to negative consequences. I don’t think it is coincidence at all that as our nation has gotten further and further away from the Christian faith, and as sin has been endorsed, encouraged, and embraced rather than hated and stopped...I don’t think it’s any coincidence that we are getting more hostile, broken, and divided as a nation – both at the macro level, but also at the level of the home and individual relationships. Even in the Church, we struggle with buying what the world is selling, rather than going to Jesus.

The good news is that Jesus welcomes us regardless of our spiritual health. **The present and past sin in our life doesn’t scare him off, and he wants us in relationship with him, because that’s how he gets into us to change and transform us.** We don’t need to beat ourselves up over the sin that was and is in our lives. We just have to be open to what he’s offering. Be open to him and his will, his, word, his grace, his healing, his transformative power. His whole purpose on earth was to bring forgiveness, healing and transformation into people’s lives. And that mission has not stopped for him.

He can heal us when we are in relationship with him, seeking after him, seeking his grace and power and the leading of the Holy Spirit instead of the leading of the world.

The guy in today's passage wanted physical healing...but Jesus offers even more than that, and there is clearly a deeper issue in the guy's life that needs addressing. Each of the three people we've seen in this series in the last few weeks have been desperate for Jesus. Like them, are we desperate for Jesus? Are we desperate for Jesus just at the physical level like each of them initially was, or do we deeply desire and crave the healing and transformation that he brings to our soul, as each of them ended up realizing they needed? The road to true, deep, lasting healing all starts when Jesus asks, **“Do you want to get well?” – Jesus.** The answer we give to that question speaks volumes, and really determines the course of our lives now and eternally. I pray that you and I would say to Jesus, “Yes, I want to be made well”...that we would let Jesus into the parts of our lives that need healing, even the parts we don't know yet need healing, and follow after him each and every day so we would know him: His name is Jesus.

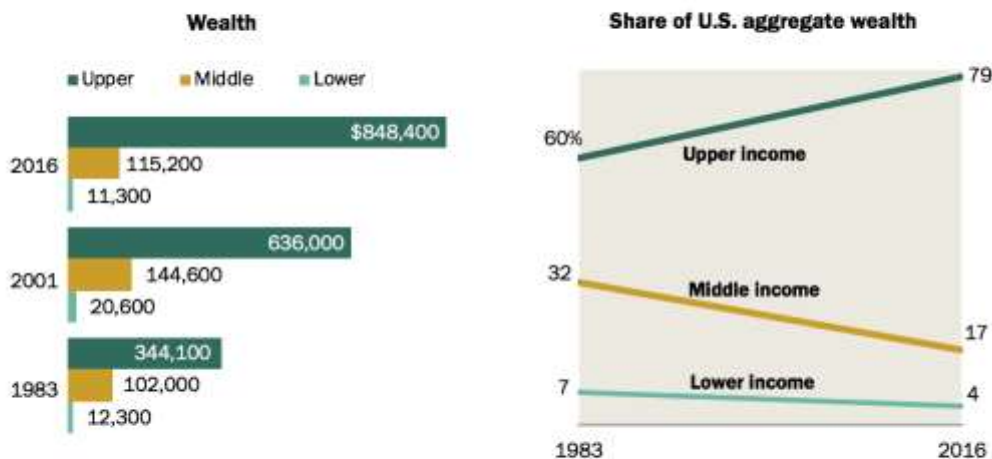
¹ There's an interesting article about all of this here (others are available online as well):

<https://blog.israelbiblicalstudies.com/holy-land-studies/where-is-the-gate-of-the-sheep/>

² Here's the graphic from the Pew Center that led to this statement in Relevant:

The gaps in wealth between upper-income and middle- and lower-income families are rising, and the share held by middle-income families is falling

Median family wealth, in 2018 dollars, and share of U.S. aggregate family wealth, by income tier



Note: Families are assigned to income tiers based on their size-adjusted income.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the Survey of Consumer Finances.

Most Americans Say There is Too Much Economic Inequality in the U.S., but Fewer Than Half Call It a Top Priority

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