

JOHN CHAPTER 5:1-9

“Do You Want To Be Healed?”

I believe that I may have had a life-changing experience after studying the first eight verses of this chapter. That is not to say that this is the first time I have read them. I have probably read them at least twenty or thirty times, but undoubtedly slipped into the same pattern that many Christians do when reading their Bibles. I did not read them slowly and carefully, concentrating on each word. I too often rush through my morning meditations and Bible reading because I have so much to do and need to get to it as soon as possible. I can think of several words to describe that kind of thinking on the part of a Christ follower, but two that pop up immediately are “ignorant” and “stupid.”

Is it possible that I truly believe I can do more for God by working hard all day long than He could accomplish through me by just speaking a word, if I only asked Him to do so? All I would need to do every morning is turn my life over to God, and He would gladly guide me through the day to accomplish whatever it is He wants me to accomplish if that is what I truly want. The most important thing we can do each day is to begin it with concentrated Bible reading and prayer. Then before going to bed, we need to thank God for His provision and care and ask for a restful and peaceful sleep so that we might begin the following day refreshed and energized. Anyone feel that way now as soon as you wake up? I am reminded once again of the words of Martin Luther when he said: “*I have so much to do today, I’m going to have to pray for two hours instead of just one.*”

Because of certain events in my life early this week the following verse from John 5:6 jumped out at me like a blinking neon sign. John writes: “*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?’*”

“Do you want to be healed?” What an odd question to ask a cripple. But we do not want to get ahead of ourselves, so let us read the first nine verses of chapter five to get an idea of the context in which Jesus made this statement, then we will begin examining each verse more closely. It is my hope and prayer that by the time we are finished you may have had a life-changing experience as a result of verse 6 as well.

John 5:1-9 ESV:

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. 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.

We do not know with any certainty which feast Jesus was observing when He went to Jerusalem, although it may have been the Passover, and that information is really not important to the underlying purpose of Jesus' trip. His underlying purpose for going was to heal an invalid and use the miracle as the basis for a message to the people. More about that message later.

Jesus knew that there would be a large crowd at this feast. People would be coming from all over the country and probably even other nations. Most would be coming in a spiritual frame of mind to worship God and perhaps grow in knowledge of God. Such a frame of mind would make them all the more curious about the incredible miracle they were about to witness and then tell others about.

So Jesus headed for the festival and when he arrived He went to this pool by the Sheep's Gate. This pool was on the way to the Temple and many people would be passing by going to and from the scheduled activities. Now this was not the kind of pool one would go to for a good time of swimming and water sports. John describes these people as "*impotent, blind, lame, paralyzed.*" These were sick people and many of them stayed here all day, and possibly even through the night. At this time there was no provision for the poor who were sick. There were no hospitals they could go to in order to receive treatment, so they were on their own. They came to this particular pool because it was reported to provide miracle cures. That was the only hope they had.

But invalids were probably not the only people drawn to this site. Think about the times in our lifetime when supposed miracles have been reported. What has been the response to such miracles by the public? They have flocked to the places where the miracles were reported to have taken place. One example that comes to mind is the woman in California some years ago who reported having received revelations from Saint Joseph. It was not long before crowds began to gather outside of her home. People even came from other countries just to be near the place where these miracles were reported to have taken place. Soon people were buying any house that was for sale near hers so they could be close to where the miracle occurred. There were even reports of armed guards required to protect the shrine that was built to Saint Joseph not far from her home.¹

The Pool of Bethesda was within the city of Jerusalem. What actually went on in the pool was that it periodically rippled because of a subterranean spring and when that happened someone at some time who may have been ill saw the occurrence as a miracle and claimed the pool had miraculous healing powers. It is very likely that story spread like a prairie fire all over the country. This must have been quite the item at the time because we find this account reported in verse 4 of some translations (KJV, NAS) indicating that

¹ Hughes, Kent, *Preaching the Word*, John 5:1-18.

an angel came down and stirred the waters and that the first person in the pool would then be healed. Now verse 4 only appears in some Bible manuscripts written after the fourth century. They do not appear in the earliest manuscripts. So we must conclude they were probably added by a scribe somewhere about that time. Verse 4, therefore, does not appear in most other translations, which we consider to be the most accurate approach. The verse really plays no significance whatsoever to the message Jesus was delivering, so we will not consider it any further.²

Imagine what it must have been like around that pool. People with all kinds of diseases and broken bodies sitting or laying around the pool waiting for the water to ripple and clawing one another out of the way so that they might get in the pool first. Sanitation must have been non-existent and the stench must have been unbearable. But here comes Jesus and He knew exactly where He was going and why He was going there. He was going to the pool because of the crowds. He knew that by performing a miracle there for all the crowds to see, word of His power would spread far and wide and thereby open their hearts and minds to receiving the message He would soon deliver.

Jesus approached the pool and this man who was confined to his bed caught Jesus' eye. Obviously this man would never have been able to get into the pool in time because he could not move, he was a paralytic. Why then do you suppose he had been sitting there for thirty-eight years? Did he really believe there was any hope of his being healed by this miracle if he could not move? What in the world was he thinking? Or could it be that there was no other hope for him; no one to take care of him? Maybe just being that close to a miracle was his only hope? Maybe it was also a good location to beg because of all the people who went by as they would any other tourist attraction. But whatever had kept him there for thirty-eight years and whatever may have been going through his mind at that moment, he was completely unaware that in just a few minutes he would rise and walk away from that awful place a totally healed man.

It might not be a bad idea for us to occasionally visit hospitals and nursing homes so that we might realize just how much we have to be thankful for.

The scene at this pool must have been pretty much the same every day. The blind, the sick, and the lame surrounding the pool, lying in the shade of the roof providing relief from the intense heat of the sun, waiting for the water to ripple, while curious passers-by stared curiously at the morbid scene wondering if they might actually see a miracle that day. But this day was to be different because Jesus had a plan. Having seen this paralytic Jesus approached him as he was lying on his bed and asked him: *“Do you want to be healed?”* Now many people reading John 5:6 must think to themselves, *“What a silly question for Jesus to ask. Of course this man would want to be healed. Who wouldn't?”* But we believe there is much more here in Jesus' question than meets the eye. In fact, let us ask you the question. Do you want to be healed? Do you want to be made well? Do you want to be physically, emotionally, and spiritually healed? Do you want to stop doing those things that are not good for you? Do you want to stop falling short of being the kind of man or woman Jesus wants you to be in His service? Do you want to stop feeling the

² Ibid.

physical and emotional suffering you continually endure because you drink too much, smoke too much, eat too much, get angry too much, look at pornography too much, hurt others too much, cheat on your wife or husband, try to justify your homosexuality, try to justify your abortion, try to control other people, cheat on your expense account, and any number of other things? Do you want to be healed of those things or would you just as soon keep doing things as you have always done them because it is easier that way? Many people suffer simply because they think they are more comfortable that way than if they were to try to change. Even if changing required as little effort as simply asking Jesus for help whenever you were tempted. If you want something are you willing to do what is necessary in order to attain it? That is a question which we encourage you to think carefully about, and that is the question that Jesus directed at this crippled man.

I would like to be a better husband, give up some bad habits, lose weight, and maybe a few other things, because doing those things would make me a better Christian in serving Christ and my fellow believers. It would also allow me to provide a better witness to unbelievers. But do I want to do what is necessary to make me physically, emotionally, and spiritually well? What about the guy at the pool? Do you think it possible that he might not have wanted to be healed? Maybe he laid by the pool each day watching others going about their daily grind and thought to himself, *"I would rather be lying here than working so hard even if I can't walk."* Sometimes we are too blind to even see how happy we would be if we were able to change. How many people operate by the philosophy, *"I have always done things this way, why change now?"*

There is nothing in our lives that prevents Christ from unleashing His power in our lives any more than the way we answer the question, *"Do you want to be healed?"*

In preaching the Gospel message to unbelievers we have noticed occasionally that there was some interest on their part. They enjoy the story, the characters, and the spirituality of the message but then decide that it really is not what they want because they really want to believe that everyone has the right to create and worship any kind of God that feels right for them. This Christian God is too inflexible. He claims there is only one way to salvation and that it is through Him alone, and that is not fair to other people who believe different things; it is intolerant and arrogant. You see, these are people who do not want to be healed. They want to have it their own way. This might be a good time to raise the question again. Do you want to be healed? Do you want to be made new? You may not like it, but that is the question Jesus is asking you today. What is your answer? If there is anyone reading or listening to these words right now who has not accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, you can be healed right now. Do you want to be healed? Because if you remain rigid in your disbelief of that message, you simply do not want to be healed. If you are already a believer, are you willing to do a searching, fearless moral inventory of yourself and recognize those things that require healing? And then do you want to be healed of those things that require healing?

What was the invalid's reply to Jesus? Did he say, *"Are you kidding? I'd give anything to be healed!"* No that is not what he said. Did he say, *"I want to be healed so badly. Please stay with me and help me to the pool when it begins to ripple"*? No, he did not say that

either. He said, *"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."* He avoided Jesus' question. He told Him that he could not get to the pool. That would have been obvious to anyone considering he could not get up off his bed. Why did he not simply say "Yes"? Only Jesus could probably answer that question. In any event Jesus had chosen this man to be healed so that His power would be made known to the large crowd in attendance. So Jesus said to the man, *"Get up, take up your bed, and walk."* *"And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath."* (ESV)

Jesus healed him by the power of His spoken word. At His command was the power of healing any disease or infirmity. Isaiah had prophesied some seven hundred years before the coming of Jesus that in the days of the Messiah the lame would "leap like a deer." Isaiah 35:5-6 NLT:

5 When he comes, he will open the eyes of the blind and unplug the ears of the deaf.

6 The lame will leap like a deer, and those who cannot speak will sing for joy!

Jesus will heal those who desire to be healed if it is within His will for that person to be healed. But in order to activate that healing power we must ask Him in faith to make us well. Jesus Himself told us, *"Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened (Matthew 7:7-8 NLT)."* Jesus also told the people, *"I tell you the truth, if you have faith and don't doubt, you can do things like this and much more. You can even say to this mountain, 'May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and it will happen. You can pray for anything, and if you have faith, you will receive it (Matthew 21:21-22 NLT)."*

The same healing power of Jesus' spoken word was evidenced when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43), and again in Matthew 8:1-3 NLT:

1 Large crowds followed Jesus as he came down the mountainside.

2 Suddenly, a man with leprosy approached him and knelt before him.

"Lord," the man said, "if you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean."

3 Jesus reached out and touched him. "I am willing," he said. "Be healed!" And instantly the leprosy disappeared.

And we see this again in Matthew 9:18-26 NLT:

18 As Jesus was saying this, the leader of a synagogue came and knelt before him. "My daughter has just died," he said, "but you can bring her back to life again if you just come and lay your hand on her."

19 So Jesus and his disciples got up and went with him.

20 *Just then a woman who had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding came up behind him. She touched the fringe of his robe,*
21 *for she thought, "If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed."*
22 *Jesus turned around, and when he saw her he said, "Daughter, be encouraged! Your faith has made you well." And the woman was healed at that moment.*
23 *When Jesus arrived at the official's home, he saw the noisy crowd and heard the funeral music.*
24 *"Get out!" he told them. "The girl isn't dead; she's only asleep." But the crowd laughed at him.*
25 *After the crowd was put outside, however, Jesus went in and took the girl by the hand, and she stood up!*
26 *The report of this miracle swept through the entire countryside.*

You and I can unleash Christ's power for healing in our lives through faith in His ability to accomplish that healing. So if we can follow orders like good soldiers in Christ's army, we will marvel at the works He performs in our lives and those of our loved ones. We are all by nature imperfect in spiritual things, *blind, lame, and paralyzed*; but provision has been made for our healing if we will only obey orders.³ Here are Jesus' marching orders for this mission:

- 1) Answer this question: Do you want to be healed?
- 2) If your answer is yes, do you realize you cannot heal yourself?
- 3) Are you willing to turn your will and your life over to the care of Jesus Christ knowing that He will make you well?

That is the mission. It is up to you if you want to volunteer for it.

We have seen clearly in the verses we have looked at that Jesus' spoken word accomplished His will. It accomplished it then, it is accomplishing it now, and will accomplish it in the future. Here in Jerusalem, beside the pool of Bethesda, was a public sign, the kind of miracle that should have made it obvious to everyone that the Messiah had come.⁴ The cure was instantaneous and undoubtedly many people at the pool must have witnessed it. We might also imagine, if we were standing there as witnesses ourselves, what the man's response was to being healed, feeling strength in his legs for the first time in thirty-eight years. He may well have shouted out with joy that he had been healed by this stranger and may have continued shouting it as he danced down the road leaping with joy with his bed over his shoulder. Once he was healed he would not have gone back to the way he was for anything. That is the way we can feel as well when we have been healed.

³ Henry, Matthew: Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume. Peabody : Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Jn 5:1.

⁴ Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:289.

We should not lose sight of the fact here that Jesus told this paralytic to “*Rise and walk.*” This was certainly a command for the disease to be removed but it was also a requirement of faith that the man had to attempt to do something that he could not have done just a few minutes before, and that he could do without having been placed in the pool. He was expected to have trust and faith in Jesus in order to be healed. Through faith he would be able to experience the miracle.

The conversion of an unbeliever is also the cure of a chronic disease. It is an awareness which recognizes that we no longer have the power to be saved on our own, without the grace of God. What do you think would have happened to this paralyzed man if he had not attempted to get up as Jesus told him to do? What if he had just continued to lay there telling Jesus to go away and annoy someone else with His foolish promises? According to all that Scripture tells us, this man would not have been healed. I believe Jesus would have gone on to another man or woman who wanted healing in order to accomplish His purpose for performing a miracle that day.

There is further wonder if we look closely at the order of Jesus’ words to the paralytic. Jesus did not say, “*Rise and walk. Pack up your bed and be on your way.*” Jesus said, “*Rise, pack up your bed and walk.*” We would conclude that this carefully worded order by Jesus was selected to demonstrate the man’s faith that he was healed. He would not have rolled up his sleeping mat if he did not believe he would be walking away. Imagine what the people thought when this man arose and the first thing he did was start to roll up his sleeping mat. This was a full demonstration of complete healing performed the moment Jesus spoke.

Christ will give us the power in proportion to our faith:

- No faith = No power
- Little faith = Little power
- Some faith = Some power
- Medium Faith = Medium power
- Great faith = Great power.

Have it your way. God has given us free choice. The ball, so to speak, is in our court.

There is another element to this story that we will be taking up in much greater detail shortly. Jesus was a master at working a crowd. He performed this miracle on the Sabbath and as we will see this was not unintentional. Anyone carrying a load of any kind including a sleeping mat like this on the Sabbath would have stood out like a sore thumb because no one was permitted by Jewish law to perform any kind of physical labor on the Sabbath. “*Thus says the Lord: Take care for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem.*” Jeremiah 17:21 (ESV). Everyone who saw this would have been shocked by such a site and even may have asked him, “*Why are you carrying that bed on the Sabbath?*” And he could have responded, “*Because a man at the pool healed me after being a paralytic for thirty-eight years and ordered me to pick up my bed and walk.*” We guarantee you most

everyone in Jerusalem would have heard about this incident within hours, and they did not even have cable news.

And there is more to Christ's purpose of performing this miracle on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a central issue in the conflicts between Jesus and His opponents (Mark 2:23; 3:4). Jesus was putting the Jewish leaders on notice that their time was up. For centuries they had been adding to the original law with their own ideas of how the Law could be kept. Today we refer to their efforts as "*building a fence around the Law.*" That meant that if the Law said not to work at your normal daily routine on the Sabbath and spend it resting and communing with God, they would add a bunch of other laws to insure that you would not disobey that law. Perhaps they would make it illegal for someone to eat on the Sabbath because in order to eat they would have to lift pots and pans in the kitchen which would be classified as work. It was nothing but a power trip on the part of the Jewish leaders and they had greatly misrepresented the original intent of the Law. By performing this miracle on the Sabbath, Jesus was telling them that He was Lord of the Sabbath and He had the power to make any alterations to it that He pleased and they had better recognize that.⁵ Jesus pretty much summed up the Sabbath day in Mark 2:27 where He said: "*The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath.*"

Had the religious leaders known their own Scriptures, they would have recognized their Redeemer; but they were spiritually blind.⁶

Now, when Jesus did this miracle on the Sabbath and commanded the paralytic to carry his bed, He was widening the gap between the Jewish leaders (the Pharisees) and Himself. With this miracle, the Pharisees decided they were going to have to do away with Jesus. So from a human perspective Jesus sealed his death warrant with this miracle. It sent him to the cross. He loved the paralytic that much. He loves you and I that much as well.⁷

So again I ask you, "*Do you want to be healed?*" And if your answer is yes, what is Christ asking you to do in the place of "*Take up your bed and walk?*" What obedience is He asking of you so that you might be healed?

⁵ Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume. Peabody : Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Jn 5:1.

⁶ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 5:1.

⁷ Hughes, Kent, *Preaching the Word*, John 5:1-18.