



Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: John 5:1-16

¹After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ²Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. ³In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. ⁵One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶When 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?” ⁷The 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.” ⁸Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” ⁹And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath. ¹⁰So 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.” ¹¹But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’” ¹²They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’” ¹³Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. ¹⁴Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. ¹⁶And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

1. The Third Sign – Jesus heals a sick man
 - a. A Sign of the coming kingdom – Isa. 35: 4-6
 - ⁴Behold, your God
... will come and save you.”

- ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.
For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
- Restoration of every aspect including human weakness and disability

b. The setting:

- a. The pool in Jerusalem,
 - a. outside the temple
 - b. apparently had supernatural powers,
 - c. not related to a personal God
- b. A multitude of people
 - Not permitted to enter the temple because they were blind, lame, disabled;
 - Excluded from temple worship; marginalized, not able to participate in Jewish feasts.
 - "Lameness, as a physical disability, deformity, & impairment, causes its victims to be *socially ostracized & religiously excluded from entering the Jerusalem Temple*...(Lev. 21:16-20; 2 Sam. 3:8...) It is no surprise, then, that as an outcast, this lame man is...[at] the pool of Bethesda..." [Amir M. Dinkha, *Restored, Rescued, & Redeemed by Jesus*, 92]

2. God's generous grace

- a. Jesus finds the man – sick for 38 years
 - a. Jesus initiates
 - "Do you want to get well?"
 - b. Why did God approach this man?
 - God's sovereignty, no reason from human point of view
 - "Kostenberger proposes that Jesus 'takes pity' on the man & it is this that motivates the healing, this is certainly not stated in the text. Rather, as DA. Carson surmises 'The *sovereign initiative is with Jesus; no reason is given* for his choice'." [Louise A. Gosbell, *"The Poor, the Crippled, the Blind, & the Lame": Physical & Sensory Disability in John*, 287-8]
- b. Jesus ignores
 - a. The man's response to his question
 - b. The pool
 - c. Human understanding and effort to get well
 - a. Seeking things that are outside of a relationship with God
- c. Jesus directs
 - a. "Get up, pick up your mat and walk"
 - b. The man is totally helpless
 - a. "God helps those who **cannot** help themselves"
 - c. You are leaving this place and not coming back
 - "In telling the sick man, "Get up, pick up your mat and walk," Jesus is not saying, "Get up and walk around to prove to everyone that you are healed." He is saying, "Get up, leave this place and take your mat with you, because you aren't coming back. You don't need to stay here any longer." J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, p. 294
 - d. A display of God's generosity and grace
 - "The healing by the pool is a demonstration of *unprovoked grace*. Nothing in the man's conduct or disposition accounts for the cure that brought to an end nearly 40 years of affliction. He becomes a *passive recipient of remarkable grace*...[It shows] the indiscriminate character of God's goodness & the fact that God (...on occasion) helps those who do not even ask for it...The old slogan that faith works miracles utterly breaks down with this story. It is God who works miracles, and *not even faith is a precondition*...Miracles can be performed independently of faith, but [also] *miracles do not always produce faith* [e.g. Jn. 5:1-9]. " [Charles B. Cousar, *Texts for Preaching: Year C*, 320-1]

3. The man's first encounter with Jesus

- a. Not requesting healing
 - Contrasts with previous case where the official asked Jesus to come and heal his son.
- b. Stuck in his concept of the way to be healed
 - It is all about the pool – outside of God
 - We try all kinds of ways to “heal ourselves”
 - God is the last resort
 - His understanding is that healing is limited to being the first into the pool – only one wins, zero sum
 - He is a hopeless case
 - Produces a competitive attitude
 - Wrong concept that God is limited
 - “The man responds to Jesus’ question the same way Nicodemus responded to Jesus’ offer to be “born *anōthen* (from above)” with protests that Jesus’ suggestion is impossible. The man interprets Jesus’ question through his own presuppositions about how healing can be accomplished and therefore, can only bemoan his predicament (v. 7). Jesus responds to the man’s complaint with three imperatives: rise, take up your bed, walk (v.8).” Gail O’Day, *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary: John*, 492
- c. No indication of faith
 - Whatever doubts there may have been about the man’s motives (see v.7), Jesus knows that he truly wants to “get well,” and he grants his wish unreservedly, with no requirements, or even any mention, of “faith” (contrast 4:50, 53; also Mk 2:5). J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, p. 294
 - “The *lack of any request* to Jesus for healing, or *any hint of faith* on the part of the sick man *prior to the cure*, emerges as the most prominent feature of this incident...When this story is compared to the previous one, about the healing of the son of the official who...demonstrates profound faith (4:46-54), the feature stands out even more.” [Charles B. Cousar, *Texts for Preaching: Year C*, 320]
- d. Doesn't recognize Jesus, nor tries to find out who he is

4. The man's second encounter with Jesus in the temple – 14-15

- a. Recognizing it was Jesus only by name
- b. Jesus warns to him
 - a. Recognize that you have been made well
 - “Jesus, re-entering the story in v. 14, takes the initiative and finds the man in the Temple. Jesus’ words to the man are in two parts. First, Jesus confirms the reality of the healing, ‘you have been made well’ (v. 14a). Second, Jesus speaks to the man about sin. In John, the verb ‘to sin’ occurs elsewhere only in 9:2-3. In Mark 2:5-10, Jesus links his healing of the paralytic man with the forgiveness of sins, yet in John 5:1-9a the healing does not seem to involve forgiveness of sins; so it seems wrong to read Jesus’ words in v. 14 as embracing the traditional linkage of sin and illness.... That is, v. 14 does not address the man’s pre-healing condition. Jesus does not speak of what was required for healing but of the response to the healing already received; he urges that the man’s healing should be more than physical. The man needs to be spiritually healthy also, as the expression ‘be made well’ suggests.” Gail O’Day, *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary: John*, 493
 - b. Don't sin anymore
 - “...what do we make of Jesus’ warning to the man he had healed? It implies that a connection between sickness and personal sin is at least a distinct possibility. The possibility is later raised explicitly by Jesus’ disciples on encountering the beggar who was blind from birth (9:2), and Jesus did not claim that such a connection was unthinkable. Only that it did not apply in that instance (9:3). On the other hand, the issue never came up in the case of the royal official’s son, nor does it when Jesus learns of the illness of his friend Lazarus (11:3). Jesus in the Gospel views sickness first of all as an opportunity for healing and salvation (see 9:3-4; 11:4), not as a punishment for sin, and the same is true here.” J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, p. 298
- a. “sin” in John is not believing
 - “Jesus warns [the healed man] not to sin any more (5:14). In the 4th Gospel, *failure to recognize Jesus & to believe in him is called sin* (9:41; 15:22-24; 16:9). On this understanding of sin, Jesus’ warning to the man makes good sense. He had not turned to Jesus in gratitude for his healing but had blames his benefactor [his healer—Jesus]. Jesus warns him against doing this again. The man has not shown active antagonism but Jesus views his passive attitude as irresponsible & sinful. Far from heeding Jesus’ warning, the man now acts on his own initiative for the first time. He

goes away to tell the Jewish religious authorities that it was Jesus who made him well (5:15). At best this is thoughtless acquiescence with the powers that be. At worst, it is cowardly collaboration with Jesus' enemies. It is certainly a negative reaction to Jesus' generous initiatives. At this point the man disappears from the story." [Lamar Williamson, *Preaching the Gospel of John*, 59-60]

b. Warning because there is no sign of faith

c. Miracles or signs are to point us to Jesus – John 20:31

- ³¹ but these [signs] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:31

c. Fails to recognize who Jesus really is.

a. contrast with Samaritans – “the Savior of the world” (4:42)

b. contrast with royal official (4:46-53)

c. Gives his name to the Jewish leaders

- Different views as to what this man's purpose was
- May be a betrayer
- “This man doesn't become a disciple of Jesus. Like some [others]...touched by Jesus *he falls away, becoming a betrayer* (5:15; cf. 6:71). Already aware that the [Jewish] leaders opposed Jesus, *he informs on Jesus & so prefigures* analogous acts of betrayal in the Gospel. (Confessing Jesus only as a healer wouldn't impress the [Jewish] authorities).” [Craig S. Keener, *John*,]

d. Not rejected like the blind man in John 9

- “While the [healed] *man in John 5...appears to find social restoration*[within 2nd-temple Judaism] following his cure, as evidenced by his immediate return to the temple, the [healed blind] *man in Jn. 9, by contrast, is 'thrown out' of the synagogue* as a result of his public declarations regarding Jesus...his [the *blind man's healing*] *does not bring him restoration, but rather further exclusion* [from 'mainstream Judaism'].” [Louise A. Gosbell, *The Poor, the Crippled, the Blind, & the Lame': Physical & Sensory Disability in...John*, 320]

c. No positive response to Jesus' healing him

a. His healing should have produced a positive response, but it appears there is nothing – no gratitude, no faith, no amazement

- “His fate remains uncertain. The sick man has “gotten well,” and by implication his past sins have been forgiven, yet he is not “born from above,” as Jesus told Nicodemus a person must be (see 3:3, 6). His status, like that of Nicodemus himself, is still undecided. We do not know, and will never know for certain, whether this man is one “who practices wicked things” and “does not come to the light” (3:20), or one who “comes to the light, so that his works will be revealed as works wrought in God” (3:21). J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, p. 299
- “The healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda *fails to produce an anagnorsis [recognition]*.”—R. Alan Culpepper

b. No sign of faith

c. Miracles do not necessarily produce faith

- “Meeting Jesus & even being physically healed by him *does not irresistibly rouse faith* & transform a human life.” [Gerald O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*, pp. 187-8]
- Some say that if they see a miracle they will believe
- This case proves otherwise
- The man's “*bodily cure points to another level of wholeness & life* which is associated with the person of Jesus. Jesus warns him that sin has consequences...But the man *doesn't seem to respond to the offer of a relationship & new life*; he shows *no sign of thanks, openness, or faith development*. Koester thinks his sin is his lack of [faith-] responsiveness to Jesus. Rather, he hurries away to inform the religious authorities of the identity of the man who had cured him. Some commentators view the man as an ungrateful informer; others consider him simply as dull & naïve, slow to recognize...[what's] special about Jesus...[Either way,] *a wonderful opportunity has been allowed to slip by...He has accepted the physical healing, but rejects his healer, fails to move into a faith response...These healing signs demonstrate that *Jesus can give life physically... & can bestow the gift of eternal life* both now & at the last-day resurrection.” [Michael T. Winstanley, *Symbols & Spirituality*, 100-1]*
- “The healing story is...one of the most enigmatic in John. Unlike most healings in John, where people in need come to Jesus, here *Jesus takes the initiative*, asking...“Do you want to be made well?” (5:6). Surprisingly, *there's no response of faith*(sf. 2:11; 4:55). The man simply goes away (5:15)...Only when the man is healed are we told that it was the Sabbath day (5:9). This timing...precipitates...conflict with ‘the Jews’.” [Robert P. Vande Kappelle, *Truth Revealed*, 96]

Conclusion:

1. God is gracious and generous even without us asking – (not our attitude)
 - God helps those who **cannot** help themselves
2. Miracles do not always result in people believing
 - He was healed but didn't get what he should have – faith
 - Miracle is not the goal; faith is the goal
3. He got second best – no eternal life
 - We should have a response of faith/believing to God's grace towards us
 - Don't settle for less, merely a miracle but:
 - Believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that by believing we may live in his name