

## **Do You Want to Be Healed?** **John 5:1-16**

(Read Text)

Here Jesus is on a religious holiday coming to the old city of Jerusalem, but he doesn't go to the Temple to worship. He doesn't seek out the wise men of the town for discourse. Rather, he goes with haste to this place where the clientele are the blind, lame, or paralyzed. It was a place that wouldn't be beautiful by our standards. The odors of illness and unkempt bodies weren't pleasant smells. The sight of uncared for broken bodies in their own waste turned many stomachs.

There was Jesus, walking in, looking around the five gates, seeing all the sick that congregated there, and finally selecting this person who had obviously been there for a very long time. Jesus turned to this man and asks, "Do you want to be healed?" Now some of the questions Jesus asks seem a bit silly to me. It ought to be pretty obvious that a person lying on a mat, who has been there for 38 years waiting for healing, and who knows he is sick, would want to be healed. But Jesus asked him, "Do you want to be healed?"

Let's think about that for a moment as we begin revival services. Is it possible that some sick people don't want to be healed? Might this be an appropriate question for us with regard to our spiritual, physical, and psychological conditions? If Christ were to come to Yates Baptist Church today and ask, "Do you want to be healed?" what would you say? Most of us know of the sickness in our lives. We just don't like the remedies. (Can I get an Amen?!!) The remedies usually call for a change, a change of lifestyle, a willingness to work on a difficult relationship. The doctor says you need to eat less fat, no salt, less sugar, cut down on the fries and chocolate chip cookies and we say, "I think I'll go get a second opinion." The counselor says, "You need to spend less time at work, more time with your family. You need to pamper your wife now and then. You need to get back to church as a family." And we say, that sounds good. I'll do that next year. The prophet Malachi says, "Stop robbing God and bring all your tithes into God's storehouse." And we say, "But Malachi doesn't understand the debt I have."

### **Three Excuses for Avoiding Healing**

We have all sorts of excuses for avoiding healing in our lives. And equally we put up all sorts of defenses to prevent healing from taking place in our hearts. Why don't we turn loose from our illnesses? Why don't we open ourselves to God's Spirit to live as our Creator calls? Well, look back at the man who had been ill for 38 years.

#### **I. Sickness had become a way of life**

For him, as for us, sickness has become a way of life. All of us know people who have illnesses, sometimes physical illnesses, who have learned to manipulate and use those illnesses to satisfy some psychological need or maintain a hold on another person. Some children learn that the only way they can get their parent's attention is by being sick. If they simply develop a little temperature or have a bit of a sore throat, then the parent who does not have time to talk with them or time to deal with them in ordinary

circumstances will find time for them. We learn to use our illnesses, both physical and psychological – yes, spiritual too – to manipulate other people and control our world. Illness may be a hiding place from responsibility.

Do you realize that in Jerusalem in his day and time, this man had as good a way of earning a living as was to be found? As long as he lay each day on this mat, people would pass by, pity him, and throw a few coins his way. No one expected much of him. He was able to live fairly comfortably off his illness, just as we are sometimes able to live comfortably off our illnesses. It's not uncommon to resist healing because healing would mean an assumption of responsibility in our lives. For this man to be healed would mean that no longer would people look at him as an invalid, no longer would they have pity for him and expect nothing of him. They would demand that he assume a normal role in his society. He would be expected to go to work and earn his own bread. He would be expected to care for others rather than be cared for. So it is with us. There is always a threat, some change called for on our part when we accept healing.

## **II. Fear of Responsibility**

There is a second reason for avoiding healing. It is the fear of responsibility.

Some time ago I read a newspaper account of a bizarre parole board hearing. A 70 year old man who had spent most of his life in prison was offered a parole. In tears, he rejected the offer, explaining that he had lived so long in prison that he would not know how to live in the outside world. He didn't want responsibility for his life. Is it possible that we can be imprisoned to some self-destructive lifestyle? I think so. I know many devout Christians who have rejected the grace and freedom that Jesus Christ offers and have substituted a religion controlled by another person. Many Christians prefer the security of ignorance, daily routine, unexamined values, and decisions by proxy, rather than a living faith that carries with it living responsibly.

Not long ago a lady called me concerned about her daughter. The daughter now lives in Clemmons, NC where I grew up. The daughter is attending Victory Baptist Church. The mother wanted to know if I knew anything about it. I didn't know of the church but after hearing this woman's story I believe I have a good idea about it. This woman is afraid her daughter is becoming psychologically and spiritually unglued. The daughter, who has always been a good, stable Christian, is plagued with fear and guilt. She keeps dreaming that Satan is going to get her because she isn't witnessing enough. Her husband of one year doesn't want to go to Victory Baptist Church anymore but she is addicted to it and literally afraid to leave. Through a 30-minute conversation with the girl's mother I learned that this young lady was in a new environment, a big city for the first time in her life, newly married to a husband without a job, and she's homesick. To provide herself some much needed security she has handed over her psychological and spiritual freedom to this church in hopes that it will stabilize her life. Sometimes we want to remain sick so someone else will be responsible for us.

## **III. Refusal to Give up Sin**

There is a third reason for avoiding healing. There are times we wallow in our sickness because we refuse to live according the abundant, beautiful way of life Christ has freed us to live. Simply put we won't let go of our sins. In Shakespeare's play

Hamlet, King Claudius who has murdered his brother, married his brother's wife, and usurped his brother's kingdom, struggles with the results of his wicked acts. Like many of us, in spite of this dreadful behavior he goes through the routine of evening prayers. He struggles to pray. He kneels, casts himself down on the floor, and cries out with great anguish that his prayers seem to bounce off the ceiling. But he knows why his prayers die as soon as they fall off his lips:

Pray, I can not  
Though inclination be as sharp as will;  
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent.

He knows that he clings to the rewards of his sin and thus can find no relief from it. His mind and heart can't ascend to God while he clings to those things that motivated his wickedness. How often this is true for us. We want to be forgiven of sin; we want to be cleansed; we want to be made whole again. But we are unwilling, like King Claudius, to turn loose of those things that have brought us into weakness. Our choices leave us paralyzed in a state of dependency, alienation, and separation.

"Do you want to be healed?" Jesus asked. The man does not answer the question directly but offers instead excuses for not having been healed. Notice what he said (in verse 7). Jesus doesn't bog down in a debate. He gives an invitation. No excuses! Here is your opportunity! Act now! "Rise, take up your pallet and walk."

### **A Call to Action**

You know, it's so easy to get bogged down in the search for excuses for our problems, that we have no energy left to solve them. Christ calls for action. "Rise, take up your pallet and walk." When we're set free from sin, free from the things that make us less than we ought to be, immediately we have placed upon us the responsibility to respond to the gift of God. Freedom is freedom to act according to the image of God within us. We should remember that the prayers of Christians always are to be geared to the action of Christians and the responsibility to do that which God has called us to do.

After my father was hit head on in a car accident in May 1993, I went to see him in Winston-Salem. He had been taken to intensive care at Baptist Hospital. He had multiple internal injuries, broken ribs, lacerated organs, including a heart that had been torn from its protective sack. All of these required multiple surgeries. Days went by and one day before visiting hours began one of the men helping run my father's tire business showed me the numbers on the books. The cash flow didn't look good. It had trickled to a dangerous level. Bills had to be paid, taxes, insurance, payroll, rent, you name it. My father had a knack for making things happen. His business was in the center of the African-American community of Winston-Salem. His niche in the tire market was in this community. Over the years he had developed meaningful relationships with people of this community. They trusted him and liked him and gave him their business. They didn't care about the company, but they would do business with "John." Well, John was no longer there to make things happen.

After looking at the books, I told the 4 remaining employees, "I'm going to get some business."

"Where to?" they asked.

“I don’t know.”

I went into the heart of the community near Kennedy High School and began to walk the streets. Every time I saw a car that needed tires I gave them Dad’s business card and told them the situation. We needed cash. I went to the 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist church where I saw a church van that needed tires. I talked with the principal of the church school and sold him a set of tires for the van and his daughter’s car.

Later I came to an apartment where I told a lady she needed some tires. She threw her arms around me and said, “Oh, the Lord has sent you.”

I said, “I know I just talked to him.”

As it turned out we eventually had to sell my father’s business because he died of multiple injuries 9 days after the accident. But during those days when I didn’t know if he was going to live or die, I wasn’t going to let his business fold without a fight.

There is so much that we ask God to do which God has set us free to do .!..! How dare we pray for the victims of hurricanes when we do nothing to help the victims. How dare we pray for racial and ethnic peace when we do nothing to bring it about? How dare we pray that God will heal those who are sick when we are unwilling to participate in that healing ourselves.! How can we week after week pray for the lonely, the sick, and the hurting, the pained in the nursing home when we are unwilling to get our hands dirty, to offend our nostrils, to inconvenience our schedules to do anything about it? How dare we pray for spiritual growth in our lives when we have already made up our minds that nothing in our lives needs to change, no sins need to be confessed, no deeper commitments need to be made. Jesus said to the man, “Pick up your pallet and walk.” Take some responsibility for your life. And so it is with all of us. He says to us when he calls “Take up your pallet and walk!”

Finally the man did it. He got up, picked up his pallet and left. Notice what happened to the poor fellow. As soon as he obeyed Jesus, the religious people got on his case. (Look at 9b-10). But not his response in verse 11 (Read). In his excitement, he had put aside social and religious norms and focused on the one who had demonstrated healing power. That is the challenge for every Christian. We should keep our mind stayed on the one who said, “Rise and walk.”

How many of us hide from the suffering of a lost generation because it’s not socially acceptable or expedient? When will we stop asking, “What will people think?” and begin to ask “What will God think?” Are we willing to break some rules to do whatever God has called us to do in the acceptance of our responsibility as God’s healed people? Jesus said, “Rise take up your pallet and walk.” It was against the religious law, but God’s healing power calls us to do some pretty unorthodox things.

## **The Healing**

The healing this man received differs somewhat from most of the healings in the New Testament. The difference is a significant one. We have often placed so much emphasis on faith that we have made faith itself a good work that we do. We have made it a point of boasting. Did you notice that this man who was healed by Jesus didn’t seek Jesus out? Jesus sought him out. Even after Jesus healed him, the man ran off without asking who it was who had healed him. He didn’t know who Jesus was. When the Jews attacked him for carrying his pallet he said, “That man told me to.” And they said to him, “Who is that man?” And he said, “Hmm. I don’t know. I never thought

to ask his name.”

Isn't that like us? There is so much in our lives that God has done for us that we don't know about. So much that he has done in healing us, in setting us free, in providing for us to become the whole people that he intended us to be. We don't always have to know the formulas; we don't have to know the religious propositions; we don't have to know the rituals. We only have to respond to that grace that comes to us, and we must respond to what God is doing in our lives. The crippled man of 38 years didn't care who healed him or how, but he knew that he had been made whole. It reminds me of another healing that Jesus performed. A man who had been given his sight was interrogated by the religious authorities. They said, "Who did this to you?" And the man only responded, "I don't know who did it. All I know is that I was blind, but now I see."

How marvelous it would be if we could see that God has been working on our behalf in ways we didn't recognize. He has been working for us even when we didn't pray. He has been working for us outside the walls of this church. He heals according to his will and his time. He gives us power and strength. If we could only respond without being able to identify, or explain what has happened. When we recognize that we have been healed, that we've been given strength and life, how wonderful it would be if we acted on that gift of God.

## **Conclusion**

Jesus is addressing us today, in this room, in this worship service. He is approaching you, looking you in the eye, and with divine sincerity asking, "Do you want to be healed?"

\* Do you want your marriage to be what it ought to be? Then why are you passive and inactive about it?

\* Do you want to be free of depression? Well, do you avail yourself of God's gifts and opportunities and counseling possibilities and all the many ways in which depression can be healed? Accept the gifts of God!

\* Do you want to be healed? Are you willing to give up those things that cause you to be less than what God calls you to be? Turn loose of the addictions in your life

\* Do you want to be healed? God is the healer. Even before you knew his name, before you were born, before you were a thought in your parent's mind, God loved you. God became man and died on the cross for you. God provided for your freedom before you even knew his name. He gave his life for you, so that if you will accept his love, and believe on the name of Jesus Christ, you will be healed. You will be saved.

Now that you know, how will you act upon it? This is the invitation. It's always the invitation of God that we be healed, that we be made whole, that we accept the gift that he has offered us and acted responsibly upon it.

Do you want to be healed? "Rise, take up your pallet and walk!"