

Series: "Encounters With Jesus"  
"The Man by the Pool"

*Turn to John, chapter 5.* Jesus is in Jerusalem for one of the Jewish religious festivals. While there He made His way to a large pool known either as "Bethesda" (House of Mercy) or Bethzatha (House of Olive). When my wife Nancy and I went to the Holy Lands years ago, we saw excavations at the traditional site of this pool. The pool had become known as a healing place. There were 5 covered walkways by the pool that provided shelter for many sick folk. "In these lay many invalids - blind, lame, and paralyzed" (John 5:3).

*Check your Bible.* Chances are there is no verse 4 included (actually, the last part of verse 3 and all of verse 4 are omitted from most modern translations). These verses are *not in the best Greek manuscripts*. The gospel writer John probably did not write these words – they were added later by someone who apparently wanted to explain why people were there. They are listed as a footnote in my Bible. After verse 3 it continues: "*waiting for the stirring of the water; for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred up the water; whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was made well from whatever disease that person had.*"

Archeologists tell us that there was an underground stream that occasionally bubbled up and disturbed the waters of the pool. People at that time explained it by saying an angel every so often stirred the waters. There was a common belief then that demons and spirits inhabited every tree and river and hill and stream. Regardless of the cause, people believed that when the water was stirred, the first one to get into the pool would be healed.

Out of all the sick people there, the story focuses on one man. "One man was there who had been ill for 38 years" (John 5:5). 38 years! That's a long time! You don't have to tell that to a man named Malcolm Alexander. In 1979 Malcolm, a black man, was arrested for raping a white woman in Louisiana. It wasn't until January of 2018 that DNA evidence proved his innocence. He spent 38 years in jail for a crime he did not commit. This man by the pool was imprisoned with his illness for 38 long years. 38 years ago Ronald Reagan was President. The median price of a home was about \$76,000. Gas averaged 86 cents a gallon. So, this sick man had been there a long, long time!

For whatever reason, Jesus responds to him. Why do you think Jesus chose him, out of the crowd of sick people all around that pool? Apparently, because Jesus knew he had been there for such a long time. "When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, 'Do you want to be made well?'" (John 5:6). Look at the man's answer: "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 making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me'" (John 5:7). Jesus wastes no time in responding to this sick man's need: "Jesus said to him, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk.' At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk" (John 5:8-9a). Here is another instance of Jesus healing a person miraculously!

*Healing was an integral part of Jesus' ministry.* Jesus came announcing that God's kingdom, God's rule, was breaking into this world. He demonstrated that in 3 ways: through His teaching,

His preaching, and His healing. When God's kingdom comes fully there will be no more sickness and death. Jesus' healing people was a sign, a foretaste, of what it will be like when God's kingdom comes and sickness is banished completely!

Even when Jesus was no longer here on earth physically, healing continued in His name. The apostles performed miracles of healing. The church was given instructions to continue Jesus' ministry of healing. James 5:14-16 instructs us, "Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up." This is why we have a healing emphasis each month at Community church. But praying for the sick to be healed is something that we should be doing regularly.

Now, life experience tells us that not everyone we pray for is healed – at least not healed as we would define healing, or as we would hope. There's a mystery to this. No one has all the answers to the question why some are healed, and others are not healed. And if our faith is based on God always doing what we think God should do, we're on shaky ground. But when we pray in faith for God to heal, we open ourselves in a much greater way for the God's healing power to work – even sometimes in miraculous ways!

An invalid by the Pool of Siloam is healed after being sick 38 years. Another of the amazing stories of the power of Jesus to heal.

We can easily stop here, and it'd be a wonderful story of Jesus healing a man – miraculously! But, *there are some things going on here – beneath the surface – that are intriguing!* For one thing, why does Jesus ask: "Do you want to be made well?" (verse 6). Isn't that a stupid question? Why *wouldn't* he want to be healed? He had been an invalid for much of his life! But, *did Jesus know something about this guy that we don't know?* You wonder about that, especially as you read on.

Jesus disappears for a while, then catches up with the man later: "Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, 'See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.'" (John 5:14). "Don't sin anymore, or something worse can happen to you!" That suggests something else is going on in this man's life that's affecting his physical health! Was there some sin in his past or present that lay at the root cause of his illness?

*There are a number of reasons why we may be physically ill.* Sometimes it's easy to determine the cause of a physical illnesses or injury. We slip on the ice and break our wrist. We eat contaminated food and get food poisoning. We're cutting up vegetables and accidentally cut ourselves with a knife. Someone with a cold or flu sneezes near us, and we catch what they have.

But sometimes our *physical* ailments may stem from underlying *emotional or spiritual* issues. We all know that *stress*, for example, can contribute to high blood pressure or gastro-intestinal problems or heart issues. How many school children develop stomach aches when they have to

face a test, or do something that day in school that stresses them out. They may really have a tummy ache – but the root cause is the stress related to their fears or their anxieties.

When I was single, and dating, I developed a very embarrassing habit. Whenever food was served, I'd feel sick to my stomach. I'd be with a girl and this nice meal was put before me and I'd look at it and feel like barfing! It was humiliating. (I only realized years later that this was a type of panic attack). So, the nausea wasn't caused by anything I ate – it was caused by what was going on in my head and my emotions. By the way, once Nancy and I were engaged, the problem went away! In fact, after we got married it *really* disappeared! I could eat then! I gained weight. My collar size expanded probably within 6 months after we got married!

So, if we just go after the *physical* problem, that's not enough! For instance, if we just pray for healing from headaches, or high blood pressure, or stomach discomfort, we may be praying for the *symptom*, rather than the *root cause*! In the case of the man by the pool, it appears that his *physical* incapacity was rooted in some deeper issue. Jesus healed his physical problem, but later addressed what was connected to his paralysis – some sin in this man's life. *So, it's important to try to pray not just for the symptom, but any underlying issue that's affecting one's physical health.*

As we read this story of the man by the pool we get some hints at what might have contributed to this man's need for healing. It has to do with his *attitude*.

*Is there self-pity there?* I kind of sense it when you look at the man's response to Jesus' question, "Do you want to be made well?" He says, "I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me" (John 5:7). Can't you almost sense this man's whining, his "poor me" attitude? "I try to get down there (sob, sob), but someone else always beats me to it! Self-pity is a sick attitude. It indicates ingratitude, too much self-focus.

*Is the man by the pool into blaming?* Perhaps blaming others for butting ahead of him. Or blaming others for not doing enough to help him get into the pool faster? Blaming others is a sick attitude that needs healing.

*Or maybe there's escapism here.* His illness allowed him to escape some of the responsibilities of life. Maybe he got more from being sick than from being well. Bishop Gerald Kennedy in a sermon wondered if this man weren't "making a career out of (his) weakness. It was not too bad a life. His friends brought him there in the morning and came for him at night. The city had provided shade from the sun and protection from the rain. Here he met his cronies, and they talked together through the day. They watched other people going about their work and bearing their burdens, which is always a pleasant recreation."

Sometimes getting sick, or staying sick, can be a way of releasing us from life's responsibilities. We can get attention. We can get sympathy. It's like in the old Andy Griffith show, where Andy

said of Miss Emma Watson: "She's been enjoying poor health for years!" A very conscientious man, given a job too big for him, developed asthma every time he got into a jam and couldn't handle the situation. He didn't consciously realize what he was doing, but unconsciously he had to develop a reason for not being able to handle a job.

It's been estimated that 5/6 of the cases of heart trouble among servicemen in 1917-18 was wrongly diagnosed as heart disease. One man said, "Patients by the thousands were discharged and pensioned on that basis and in fact, became chronic heart disease cases." Dreading being in combat and wanting to escape it, yet not wanting to admit to being a coward, the unconscious rationale was, "I'm not a coward, but my heart is acting up, so I'm certainly not fit to go into battle."

This account of the sick man by the pool reminds us that there is sometimes more to physical illness than just physical illness. There can be underlying emotional and spiritual causes. And there are many ways we can be sick and in need of healing.

*So many of our prayers are just for physical healing.* Praying for healing of physical ailments is important! But God wants us to be whole in every aspect of our life: in our mental health, in our relationships with people, in our spiritual life and our relationship with God.

Sometimes there's something more important than being healed *physically!* Tony Campolo told a story about being in a church in Oregon where he was asked to pray for a man who had cancer. Campolo prayed boldly for the man's healing. That next week he got a telephone call from the man's wife. She said, "You prayed for my husband. He had cancer." Campolo thought when he heard her use the past tense verb that his cancer had been eradicated! But before he could think much about it she said, "He died."

Compolo felt terrible. But she continued, "Don't feel bad. When he came into that church that Sunday he was filled with anger. He knew he was going to be dead in a short period of time, and he hated God. He was 58 years old, and he wanted to see his children and grandchildren grow up. He was angry that this all-powerful God didn't take away his sickness and heal him. He would lie in bed and curse God. The more his anger grew towards God, the more miserable he was to everybody around him. It was an awful thing to be in his presence."

But the lady told Compolo, "After you prayed for him, a peace came over him and a joy came into him. Tony, the last three days have been the best days of our lives. We've sung. We've laughed. We've read Scripture. We prayed. Oh, they've been wonderful days. And I called to thank you for laying your hands on him and praying for healing." And then she said something incredibly profound. She said, "He wasn't cured, but he was healed."

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