“GET UP, TAKE UP YOUR BED, AND WALK”

We are continuing our study in the Gospel of John. The Apostle John's whole purpose in writing this is to show Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. He does this by presenting various testimonies about Jesus by people He came in contact with. Also he records the words Jesus spoke about Himself. John also includes 7 sign miracles to demonstrate that Jesus was, in fact, who He claimed to be. And, as John shows us, Jesus is more than merely a man. He IS, in fact, the only begotten Son of God, the King of Israel, the Savior of the world. In the Gospel of John we see Jesus as God in human flesh.

Well, Jesus, who is the Jew’s promised Messiah, the One whom Israel had been waiting centuries for – how was He was received by His own people, the Jews? Did they roll out the red carpet for Him? Not exactly. John Chapter 1 verse 11 tells us that “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” As we have gone thru the first 4 chapters we have seen that the reception for Jesus has been somewhat mixed. Sure, He has drawn some crowds and clearly we have seen that some embraced Him and believed Him to be the Messiah. But the religious establishment in Israel and the majority of the Jewish people did not. Jesus didn’t exactly endear Himself to the Jewish religious leaders in Chapter 2 when he took a scourge of cords and drove the money changers and their animals out of the temple, did He? Even so, up to this point in our study there has not been any open hostility toward Jesus. But that is all about to change. Beginning in John Chapter 5 Jesus does something that sets off the rejection and hostility toward Him (which ultimately will lead to His crucifixion). A public miracle that He performs leads to a direct confrontation between Jesus and the legalistic Pharisees.

READ John 5:1.

Jesus has been up north in Galilee. He did many things in Galilee on his last visit, though John only tells us about one (last week’s lesson), the healing of the royal official’s son. We know, however, from the other 3 gospel accounts, that Jesus and His disciples were up in Galilee for about a year and that He did a lot more things in Galilee during this time. As John Chapter 5 opens, Jesus has made His way back to Jerusalem for what John describes simply as “a feast of the Jews.” Many Bible scholars believe that He is going back for the second Passover feast of His public ministry. There were several feasts that male members of the Jewish household attended regularly at Jerusalem each year. This is one of those times.

READ John 5:2-4. Picture the scene: there is a large gathering of sick people, blind people, lame people, and paralyzed people. They are all around this pool. [NEXT slide - show pictures of the Pool of Bethesda and read a brief description of it] Bethesda means “city of mercy”

Notice in the text that the last part of verse 3 and all of verse 4 are in brackets and in italics. These words are not included in the ESV or in many of the newer translations because they are not in the older manuscripts. Some scholars believe that a scribe added this portion of scripture to clarify verse 7. We don’t know for sure. The way I see verse 4 is that it states what was the common belief of that day: An angel of the Lord would come and stir the waters periodically and whoever got into the water first would be healed of their disease. We don’t really know what took place here. The bottom line is that these people believed that the waters of the pool of Bethesda brought healing. These waters are what these sick people are placing their faith in for healing. You have to understand – they are desperate to be made well in a day and age where there are limited medical options.

READ John 5:5.

Can you imagine having the same illness for 38 years with no relief? But in the midst of this utterly hopeless situation, Jesus arrives on the scene.

READ John 5:6.

Jesus knows this man. He knows that he’s been sick for 38 years. How does Jesus know this? Because He’s God. Jesus asks the man a question: “Do you want to be healed?” Jesus communicates love and concern for this man. He just walks up to this sick man and asks him if he wants to be healed." Isn't that just like Jesus? In the midst of His busy ministry saving and helping people, Jesus has time to stop by this place and care about this one man.

READ John 5:7.

The man never explicitly asks Jesus to heal him. He never expresses any faith that Jesus can heal him. Not once. No, his focus, like so many people in our world today, is on his his negative circumstance.

READ John 5:8.

Jesus gives the man 3 direct commands: (1) “Get up,” (2) “take up your bed” and (3) “walk.” No long sermons. No “I will heal you if you will only have faith.” There was no “Go do such and such and then you will be healed.” At this point, faith or not, the man is healed. Jesus is the Creator of the world according to John 1:3 (“All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made”). If He could create the world out of nothing, He most certainly can create the muscles, ligaments, tendons, bones, whatever is necessary to allow this man to be able to stand up and walk. He can do this because He’s God. Jesus does all the work. The man does nothing. All the man has to do now is just get up and walk. And that’s exactly what he does in verse 9.

So, why this man? Of all the people lying there next to the pool at Bethesda, why did Jesus choose to heal this man? Was it because of his great faith? There’s no evidence of that in this passage. Was it because he was more deserving than anyone else there? I’m sure there were others there who had been sick for a long time and were just as deserving as him. Why didn't Jesus speak a word and heal everyone there by the pool? He could have. Am I right? Let me tell you why Jesus healed this one man. The answer is found later in the Chapter in verse 21… “For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to WHOM HE WILL” (John 5:21). Jesus healed this man because He chose to do so. Now, He did it in order to fulfill a divine purpose. Ultimately it was done to bring glory to God. Jesus, in an act of divine sovereignty, walks over to this one man and He heals him. And it was the healing that produced the faith, not the faith that produced the healing.

This miracle of healing was a parable in action. It sets before us a vivid illustration of God's work of grace in the spiritual realm. Just as the condition of that sick crowd of people at the pool of Bethesda depicts the depravity of the entirety of Adam's race, so Jesus Christ singling out that one individual and healing him portrays the sovereign grace of God thru Christ. Jesus singles out and redeems His own elect. That's the sovereign grace of God. I was weak. I was impotent. In a spiritual sense I was not just sick, I was dead. I didn’t want God. I wasn't really even looking for God. Life for me went on normally. But God sought me and He found me. He drew me to Himself by His sovereign grace.

Well, back to the story…READ John 5:9.

What a fantastic miracle! Jesus completely heals a man who had been unable to walk for 38 years. To his credit the man did exactly what Jesus told him to do. He got up and he rolled up his pallet and he walked right out of that place. You know what I find interesting? That he took up his bed first and then he walked. He did exactly what Jesus said to do. I’ll be honest with you, if that would have been me I would have said, “Jesus, can I leave the bed lying here and just try out my legs for a couple of steps. That way in case I fall I will have a soft mat to land on.” But this man believes Jesus and does exactly as Jesus commanded him.

And all the people lying around praised God for this great miracle, right? No, not exactly. We really don't know what the crowd's reaction was but it must not have been much. Nothing is recorded that indicates they even cared. Most people there are just focused on themselves. The last sentence in verse 9 tells us what the Jewish leadership focused on. It was not this miracle of God itself, not the fact that this lame man of 38 years was healed, but rather on the day of the week in which the miracle was performed. “Oh no, He did this on the Sabbath!”

READ John 5:10.

When the Jewish religious leaders see the man walking around carrying his pallet they rebuke him: “Hold it right there! Today is the Sabbath day. It is not lawful for you to carry your bed.” They showed such warmth and love! Here's a man who has been lame for nearly 4 decades and they don't care about him being healed. All they care about is that he is carrying a little cotton mat around. Instead of rejoicing and praising God, they berate the man for “working” on the Sabbath. The law didn't apply to something like a healed man carrying his bed. That wasn't the point. That's why the Apostle Paul said, “for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6). The reason for this particular law was to prevent God’s people for doing things on the Sabbath day for their own personal gain. Not, “don't pick up your bed and walk if you've just been healed by God.” How carnal and small minded these people are!

READ John 5:11-13.

At this point in time the man who had been healed does not even know that it was Jesus who healed him. But he’s getting ready to find out.

READ John 5:14.

What a fascinating statement. Many who study the Bible have a difficult time with this verse and everybody has their own thoughts about what it means. Let me suggest 2 possible interpretations. (1) The man is still an unbeliever. Jesus healed him and that's it. The man doesn't know anything about anything or anybody. He's just an unbeliever. And Jesus is warning him that his sin caused 38 years of illness and if he continues to sin it will cause him eternal punishment. So he needs to repent.

But I think there's a second possibility here. And it is the one that I hold to, though you are certainly entitled to your own opinion. I feel that this man was at the time of verse 14 a believer and I feel he was a believer for several reasons. I think he was a believer because he put his faith initially in what Jesus said: "Get up, take up your bed, and walk," which the man did without any hesitation at all. And that was a step of faith. I think also he was a believer because the Jewish leaders when they attacked him didn’t intimidate him in the least. I think also he was a believer because immediately upon being healed he went directly to the temple. And the temple was the house of prayer and praise, and that’s what he was doing – he was praying to God and thanking and praising Him for what God had done in his life.

So, I think he believed in God. I think he believed God had healed him. But he didn’t know yet that it was Jesus who healed him.

This man is not a believer in the sense of a New Testament believer. The cross hasn’t taken place yet. But he had accepted the revelation that God had given him. He believed God had healed him and was giving God glory for what happened. So I think in essence what Jesus is saying to this man is: “You're well," and listen, the fact that he was well indicated that something had happened to the sin that made him sick, right? It had been forgiven. He couldn't have been well if that sin had been held against him and the sin (assuming his disease was punishment for sin), could only be removed if the sin was forgiven. So I believe he was a forgiven man, and in that sense he was a believer. And the lesson for us believers is this: we are still under God's moral law, sin still has consequences, so be careful.

READ John 5:15.

Immediately after his conversation in the temple with Jesus (when he discovered who Jesus was), he goes back to the Jewish religious leaders and says, “Hey guys, I know who healed me, it was Jesus.” He wasn't afraid of them. First John 4:18 says, “ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear…” I think his love for God is actually in a state of maturity. I firmly believe this man at this point is indeed a believer. And it's also characteristic of a believer to want to share what he knows and he did that. All of this underscores my view that he was a believer. He was not only physically healed, but that physical healing produced faith in his life, which led to spiritual healing.

READ John 5:16.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were so hung up on their legalism that they began to persecute Jesus – began to talk bad about Him and say negative things about Him and to Him. All because in their minds He broke one of their laws.

READ John 5:17.

Jesus looks these religious leaders in the eye and tells them, “God My Father and I His Son do not stop working on the Sabbath. God's love, His mercy, His compassion, His judgment and all of His attributes go on for seven days a week, 24 hours a day. God does not rest.” Jesus says to them, "My Father God and I keep right on working.” What a statement! Jesus in this verse is claiming to be equal with God, isn't He? And you want to know something? The Jewish leaders got the message loud and clear that this is what He was claiming - equality with God.

READ John 5:18.

Now they resolve to kill Jesus because He not only has broken their Sabbath (or at least their interpretation of it) but now He has said that God is His Father making Himself equal with God. And they knew that is what He was saying, didn't they? Listen, if Jesus had not meant to convey that He was equal with God, but had either mis-spoken or been misunderstood, He would have stopped right there and corrected them, wouldn't He? All the cults and all the isms and all the false teachers who say that Jesus Christ is not God and that He never claimed to be God should read the Gospel of John. Specifically they need to read John 5:18. The religious leaders want Jesus dead because of this very claim. Jesus claims to be equal with God. He never denies it. He never backtracks. So then, Jesus is either God or He’s a liar and a fraud. I believe Jesus is who He claimed to be, the Son of God, equal with God, part of the triune godhead. I accept this by faith.

Jesus says to the nation of Israel and to the entire world, “Here I am and what are you going to do about it? Receive Me or reject Me?” Sadly we know that most people in the world have rejected Him. The Jews and their leadership rejected their Messiah. Why did Israel reject their Messiah? There are many reasons. (1) They rejected Him because of their self-styled hypocrisy. They thought they were right and anybody who came in and told them otherwise was rejected. (2) They rejected Him was because they wouldn't face their sin. When Jesus exposes their sin, they refused to confess it. (3) They rejected Him because they were convinced that the Messiah would come through their religious system. And when Jesus came in and started knocking things down in the temple, and telling the Pharisees what they are and calling them out, they said that this man Jesus cannot be our Messiah. (4) They rejected Him because they expected the Messiah to be a military leader, to throw off the Roman yoke. And when Jesus didn't do that, they rejected him. (5) They never dreamed their Messiah would be crucified or die (despite what Isaiah and other prophecies said).

Why do you think the world today rejects Jesus and His claim to be the only begotten Son of God? The primary reason is pride. Most people think they’re OK like they are and really don't need a Savior. They don’t like to be told they’re sinners and come face to face with their own depravity. But the Bible says otherwise. The world is not OK. We are just like the sick people laying around the pool at Bethesda just hoping to find answers. And then… Jesus comes along! He walks up to us undeserving sinners, dead in our trespasses and sins and heals us.

Some people actively seek Christ and eventually find Him. Others, like this man and the Apostle Paul don't seek Jesus. Instead, He finds them and changes their life. Jesus, the seeking Savior. “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). That included you and me… And aren’t you thankful that He did!