

JESUS SAYS, “GET UP!”

John 5:1-15

Key Verse: 5:8

Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”

In today’s passage, Jesus heals an invalid man who had been suffering for 38 years. This event teaches us that Jesus can heal us from any kind of sickness. Many of us suffer from some form of chronic problems, whether physical or spiritual. Let’s hear the voice of Jesus and get up from our mat of despair. May God help us to experience the healing power of Jesus personally!

I. “DO YOU WANT TO GET WELL?” (1-7)

Look at verses 1-3. *Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie--the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.* Jesus went up to Jerusalem to celebrate a feast of the Jews. One day, he visited the Pool of Bethesda. “Bethesda” means “house of grace” in Aramaic. There a large number of disabled people were lying around the pool. They were waiting for the moving of the waters. Beneath the pool was a subterranean stream which every now and then bubbled up and disturbed the water. They believed that the one who got into the pool first when the water was stirred would be healed of whatever disease he had. These people were usually sympathetic to one another for their problems. But once the water began to stir, there was no room for mercy or kindness.

This scene, in many ways, is a picture of this world. This world is like a hospital ward in the sense that it is filled with patients suffering from all kinds of problems. Everyone in this world is handicapped in one way or another, physically, mentally or spiritually. Each person has his or her own bitterness and sorrow. And do we ever know this is a competitive world! In the nursery school or kindergarten, we are taught how we must share and care, but soon enough we find out that this is a cruel, dog-eat-dog world. We try to help one another as long as we don’t have conflicting interests, but when we face “it’s-either-your-or-me” situation, there can be no room for mercy or kindness. It is a human dilemma with no way out. Who can deliver us from this dilemma?

Look at verses 5-6. *One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”* Jesus came into this scene. He did not come to this place to compete against them, for he was the only one without sin and sickness. Neither did he come here for a personal gain, like some politicians who visit a nursing home, accompanied by media during a political campaign. Why then did Jesus come here? Jesus looked around and saw one man lying there and learned that he had been an invalid for 38 years. Jesus had compassion for this poor person. He asked the invalid, “Do you want to get well?”

Thirty-eight years is a long time. There is a saying that even mountains and rivers change over ten years. This invalid man saw them change many times, lying on his mat. We know how long a day feels like when we lie in bed suffering from a bad cold. But this man suffered from his sickness for 38 years. After almost four decades of frustration, and after spending his family's fortune on medical expenses, everyone including himself and his family gave up on him. Finally he came to the last resort—the legendary miracle healing at the Bethesda Pool. But there was no one there to help him to jump into the pool. And being an invalid, there was no way he could beat others and win the jackpot. There was no such word as “hope” in his dictionary. And to have no hope for future was the most unbearable thing for this man.

What did Jesus do for this man? He asked him, “Do you want to get well?” This question reveals that Jesus had compassion toward the invalid. This man probably emitted an offensive odor because he could not take a bath by himself. His skin must have clung to his bones. People tend to like those who look lovely, but shun the unlovely. This invalid man was anything but lovely. Many people turned their eyes away when they saw him. No one dared to talk to him, not even, “Hi, what's up?”

But Jesus, out of compassion, asked him, “Do you want to get well?” And this was much more than a casual “What's up?” In fact, who but Jesus can ask this question, “Do you want to get well?” Only Jesus can help an invalid of 38 years. Only Jesus can heal him. When Jesus asked him, “Do you want to get well?” he expressed his desire to help this pathetic person. “Do you want to get well?” This was a voice of the Savior to the wretched person. The Lord Jesus came to this hopeless, fatalistic, and ugly-looking paralytic and asked him, “Do you want to get well?” Jesus is full of grace (Jn 1:14). The grace of Jesus is higher than any mountain and deeper than any ocean. May God help each of us to personally experience this wonderful grace!

Let us think about the importance of Jesus' question, “Do you want to get well?” At first glance, this question seems unnecessary. Why ask a hungry man the question, “Do you want to eat?” But Jesus asked a similar question to a blind man, who answered him, “Lord, I want to see.” We learn that Jesus wanted the invalid to have a holy desire to be healed by God. Jesus was standing at the door of this man's heart and knocking on it. He had to open it so that Jesus could come in.

In 1829, a man named George Wilson was sentenced to death for robbery and murder. Before he was hanged, however, President Andrew Jackson pardoned him. The presidential pardon was sent to the governor of Pennsylvania and then to the warden of the prison where Wilson was incarcerated. Then the condemned man stunned everyone by refusing to accept the pardon. The prison officials didn't know what to do. They couldn't just push him out the front door. This case became a legal tangle that ended up in the Supreme Court. The Court ruled that a pardon is worth something only if it is accepted. If it is refused, it is not a pardon. So what happened to George Wilson? He was hanged despite the pardon that had been offered to him.¹

¹ Adrian Rogers *Believe in Miracles, But Trust in Jesus*, p. 91

“Do you want to get well?” This question teaches us that we need to have a holy desire to receive Jesus’ healing touch. We must have a clear prayer topic in order to receive Jesus’ blessing. People want many things from God. But they often don’t know what they really want from God or more importantly, what God really wants them to have. They only have a wishful thinking or vague expectation from Jesus, saying, “Lord, let good things happen to me.” Worse yet, there are many people today who don’t want to be healed of their sin-sickness. They just want to lie on their mat of fatalism. Some people are afraid of change and want to maintain the *status quo*. Sin makes them helpless and they become numb to their sin-sickness problems. I know a very intelligent student. When he studied, he got all A’s. When he did not study, he received bad grades. He knew this well but still did not want to study. Instead, he spent hours, lying down beside the pool of Bethesda and wasting away precious moments of his life. Soon he dropped out of college. His problem was that he had no desire to be a good student. This is not a small matter. It is a sin to waste the resources that God graciously gave to us.

What was the invalid’s answer to Jesus’ question, “Do you want to get well?” Look at verse 7. *“Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”* He did not answer Jesus’ question. Instead, he complained about others. The man obviously wanted to be healed. But his answer indicates how his 38-year-old paralysis had affected his way of life. Instead of saying, “Yes, Lord. I want to get well,” he began to complain about his helpless situation and blame others. He was a man of fatalism because of his endless defeat in his life. But Jesus, the Lord of mercy and love, helped him anyway.

II. “GET UP! PICK UP YOUR MAT AND WALK” (8-9)

When the invalid began to complain and blame others, what did Jesus do? When our friends complain about their human situations, we first feel sympathy toward their dilemma. Sometimes we feel helpless when we cannot do anything to help them. But Jesus did not join him for his pity party. He did not show human sympathy toward his helpless situation. Instead, he challenged the invalid to get up by faith. Let us read verse 8. *Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”* Only Jesus can say this to an invalid. In Jesus there is no despair. Jesus really wanted to save him from the misery of his life. As a man created by God he should not lie down on his mat of fatalism permanently. He should not live in complaints. Instead he should live a life that is pleasing to God and a blessing to others. Jesus wanted him to overcome his fatalism by obeying his command, “Get up!” Jesus wanted him to get up and pick up his mat of fatalism and begin a new life in God.

It was not easy at all for Jesus to help this man because he had many reasons in his mind not to obey Jesus’ command. In a way he must have attached to his mat. I have seen many students who are disgusted at their sinful lives and yet are afraid to be changed by God. But when Jesus, instead of sympathizing with him, gave him the command, the man somehow obeyed and got up on his feet. God displayed his glory on this man’s life. Jesus healed a man of fatalism and gave him a new life. This teaches us that obeying God’s word is the only solution to our fundamental life problems.

There are many kinds of paralysis, both spiritual and physical, such as lustful desires, love of money, selfishness, pride, laziness, and so on. One who is sick with paralysis has no power to shake off the yoke of his chronic disease. Only Jesus can help him. He must listen to Jesus' voice, "Do you want to get well?" and "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."

Like this invalid man, all of us have a fatalistic element of life which makes us paralyzed. When we don't overcome this paralysis, we can be a source of grief to God as well as to the people around us. When we want to please God and be happy, we must obey his command, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."

III. "STOP SINNING, OR..." (9b-15)

The healing of the invalid man was an occasion for celebration and thanksgiving to God. But the Jews were unhappy about it because the healing was done on the Sabbath. They were also unhappy because they were jealous of Jesus' healing power. They were paralytics of a sort; they were paralyzed by their legalism and jealousy.

The Jews turned to the man who had been healed. "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." They threatened him, accusing him that he violated the Sabbath law by carrying the mat. The man was intimidated by the Jews and put the blame on Jesus, saying, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" It was the time for him to testify, "I was an invalid for 38 years, but Jesus healed me. Why are you trivializing the great work of God by picking on me?" But the man forgot the grace of Jesus and only worried about how to be in good terms with the religious authorities. He was healed physically, but he was still a spiritual paralytic. He was paralyzed, this time by the fear of the Jews. The Jews noticed his weakness and pressed him hard to confess, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" The man allowed them to use him as a scapegoat to accuse Jesus. When we fail to stand firm based on the fact that Jesus healed us from our sins, we give Satan an opportunity to use us as his prisoners again.

How did Jesus further help this man? Look at verse 14. *Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, You are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."* Jesus first reminded him that he was healed by the grace of God. He said to him, "You are well again by God's grace. So you must remember God's grace and thank him always for his healing." Then Jesus told him, "*Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.*" To forget God's grace is to sin against God. The Bible teaches that ingratitude is the root of sin (Ro 1:21). Adam and Eve fell into sin when they took God's blessings for granted. They became proud and began to doubt God's love. The invalid man was healed of his physical disease. But he still needed a spiritual healing. So Jesus warned him, "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." Indeed, a spiritual healing was more important for him than the physical healing, because he would die someday and face the judgment of God.

A sinful man tends to forget God's many blessings, but remember one thing that made him sorry. How forgetful we are! To receive God's grace is one thing. But to bear God's grace is another. We must remember that we are nothing but fallen men without Jesus' grace of salvation. Besides, thanksgiving to God is an essential ingredient for our happiness. In Greek, the word "thank" is "ευχαριστω (eucharisto)." This word stems from "χαρις (charis)," which means "grace." "Joy" in Greek is "χαρα (chara)," which is also from "χαρις (charis)." When we thank God by remembering his grace, we can be joyful. Do you know any happy person who has a lot of complaints?

On their missionary journey to Philippi, St. Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison for doing the work of God there. What was their reaction toward God in that situation? Did they complain bitterly to God? No. They thanked God for enabling them to participate in the suffering of Christ. They even sang hymns in the prison (Ac 16:25). They could thank God even in such an adverse situation, because they remembered God's grace in their hearts. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." To thank God is the will of God for all mankind. But to thank God requires our willful decision. A sinful man cannot thank God naturally. We must learn to thank God.

Verse 15 says that the man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. He did not listen to Jesus' word. Instead he betrayed Jesus by reporting to the Jewish authorities that Jesus was to be blamed for the healing on the Sabbath. This man was different from a blind man who was also healed by Jesus. We will study about him in John 9. When the blind man was pressured by the Jews to identify Jesus as a violator of the Sabbath law, he testified, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (9:25) This man did not forget the grace of God. He held on to one thing he knew about the grace of Jesus. Through his testimony he grew in faith and finally met Jesus personally.

When we receive the forgiveness of sin through Jesus' grace, we have to grow in personal faith by giving a clear testimony to others, like the Samaritan woman did. The best testimony is to share the grace of God with our Bible students. We can share our faith with them through 1:1 Bible study. Most of all, we must grow in faith through our personal relationship with Jesus. The man who had been healed had no idea who Jesus was (13). Though he was healed from his disease, he remained as a spiritual invalid. His relationship with Jesus was very superficial. He did not know Jesus personally. Likewise, some people study the Bible for a long time but have no idea who Jesus is. This is not good. We have to develop a deep relationship with Jesus by standing firm on the fact that Jesus healed us from our sin-sickness through his precious blood.

In today's passage, we learned that we must have a holy desire to be healed by Jesus. Otherwise we become a slave of sinful desires. We must hear the divine voice of Jesus: "Do you want to get well?" "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk!" May God help us to overcome whatever is crippling us in fulfilling God's purpose in our lifetime!