

“Do You Want to Get Well?” (John 5:1-15)

Sunday, November 9, 2025

By Mark Archibald

As I read through these 15 verses in preparation for the sermon, I found myself laughing out loud several times. Some of the interactions in this passage I found especially hilarious. I'm not sure they were meant to be funny, but some of you may find the humour in these passages, too. Listen to this passage as it is acted out this morning. Listen for the interactions that take place. What stands out to you? (John 5:1-15)

Jesus sees the man. Jesus sees the cruelty of his situation, and yet Jesus asks, **“Do you want to get well?”** I find this question laugh-out-loud funny. Jesus knows the detail of him being unable to walk for 38 years. You almost expect a sarcastic response from the man called the “invalid” in this passage.

Of course the man wants to get well – he's superstitiously waiting near a pool of healing. He's hoping anything will work. He's close to the pool, yet can't get himself close enough to get in when “the waters are stirred”.

Of course he wants to get well – his predicament makes his entire life difficult. Mobility. Relying on people for everything. The ability to make an income. Even hygiene.

I have a leg brace. I tore my ACL which was repaired, but now have osteoarthritis issues. I had a particularly busy day last week and was walking up the stairs to get ready to go see a movie. As I was stepping up the stairs and I could smell my leg brace. It was sour. And I clean this thing every day!

How much worse, living in the middle east, living without access to tools and apparatuses to make living with a disability tolerable, would things have been for this man. Of course he wants to get well.

But someone pointed out last week that he didn't respond to Jesus with a yes or no answer. He responds with an excuse. He responds with excuses. **“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.”**

We don't really know if he does want to get well. Sure, he's by the healing waters. But is he able to make the next step to possible wholeness? Is he trying to get in and get healed, or are there more than just physical barriers in his way?

He probably has that feeling of being stuck. Have you ever been stuck? Stuck in a job that you want to leave, stuck in a situation that is not your choosing, stuck in your sorrow. You have been stuck in something for years, but you are afraid to do something about it. You are afraid to move from life sickness to health. When we are stuck in a bad situation for a long time, the temptation is to stay stuck. Stuck we know. Stuck we understand. Stuck we have figured out how to manage. But moving into freedom can be scary. Stepping into something new, even if it's healthy, can be a scary thing. We are leaving what is familiar behind.

This man has had 38 years of sickness. But he also has 38 years of habits. He's made life work, somehow and probably poorly. But he's still gotten this far. And to step into healing means absolutely everything changes.

Jesus asks this question with intent: **“Do you want to get well?”** After the excuse, Jesus does not even wait for an answer. He tells the man to pick up his mat and walk. The man does take Jesus at his word here. He gets up. He walks! Jesus ends up being the solution for the man, a different solution than he was waiting for. Jesus asks a good question, and the man steps into a new life.

Funny statement number 2: **“It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”**

Everything about this man's story seems to reek of familiarity. He is most likely a known person. He's frequently by this pool at Bethesda, he's been this way for 38 years. And yet the first observation the religious leaders give, “Hey, you can't do that!” Talk about missing the point!

Even if they are not aware of who this man is and why he may be carrying a mat, this is a shocking, come-back-to-earth moment for the healed man. This is the experience of great news happening and then immediately being deflated.

The leaders that make this comment to him – “It is the Sabbath!” – are very religious, rule-following people. They care that things are done right! They at one point had good motivations for rule keeping, but those good motivations are buried under their obsession for the rules. *“The Jews protected the Sabbath and held it aloft as a vital symbol of Jewish culture and religion.”*¹

But even they have lost their motivations. “They've lost love for God but remain consistently and vigorously religious.” (Gary Burge) Their passion for God, their love of God, their ability to hear God disappeared a long time ago. But their religious rule following remains.

Their obsession for doing things the right way has blinded them to good news. They can't celebrate with the man because they are oblivious to good news.

But as blind as they are, the religious leaders in this story are genuinely on to something. All throughout the book of John so far Jesus has been taking powerful cultural symbols and replacing them with himself. In John 1 he replaces the sacred tabernacle, the place where heaven touched earth, and he becomes the place where heaven touches earth. In John 2 he takes the sacred ceremonial hand washing jars and fills them with new wine that shows his feast and kingdom are on their way. He replaces the sacred well that the Samaritan woman drew water from and declares that he gives living water. He speaks of his own body as the Temple. He continually replaces what is sacred in culture and faith and replaces it with himself.

Now he is replacing the festivals and sacred days with himself. The day Jesus heals this man is the Sabbath. Jesus IS intentionally making a scene. Jesus is intentionally healing on the Sabbath. He's healing for the sake of doing good for this man. But he is also very intentionally healing on the Sabbath. Jesus has been replacing the sacred days with himself.

¹ *The NIV Application Bible Commentary: John*, Gary M. Burge, p. 174

As we see in the story, the Sabbath was no longer holding the true sacred space in Jewish culture and faith that it needed to. It was becoming a more and more detailed list of rules. Instead of a means of connection to God, it was becoming a god unto itself. So Jesus breaks it, and points the people to something better.

The religious leaders that encountered the now healed man did not care about his well-being. They cared about the rules. They missed the point of what the rules. And Jesus breaks the rules to show them what is good and right. All of this leads us to ask the questions: *“Are there areas of modern life that need to be violated in the name of God so that God’s person and justice can be seen by everyone?”*² Are there religious and rule things that we hold tightly to that keep people far from God. Are there forms of worship and practices that we hold to that create a barrier between people and God? Jesus seems very ok with breaking those walls and barriers down to prepare the way for the Lord.

The last (in my mind) funny statement is the one Jesus tells the man when the man finds Jesus again: **“Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”**

Imagine receiving a gift. This is a good gift. This is the thing you’ve been wishing for months, nay, years, nay, decades! A person who cares for you hands you the box. You open it. It’s what you’ve always wanted! You go to share your joy with the person and their face goes cold and stern and they say, “Now watch yourself or the next thing you are given will ruin your life!”

That’s how I see this interaction between the healed man and Jesus! Jesus has given him this abundant gift. After 38 years of paralysis he can walk! And Jesus warns: “Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” At first reading this sounds so menacing! It sounds like a threat.

When I was talking with Kayde about this this morning, he asked, “Is Jesus saying there could be consequences if he sins? Or God will actively punish or harm the man?”

Another idea: Is this like when you get a Christmas present and you’re warned, “Treat this gift well because if you break it I won’t replace it!”

It’s true that specific actions do have specific consequences. There are bad choices we can do that increase or likelihood of disaster, illness or even death.

But it is more likely that we experience something beneficial in our lives and then quickly forget that this ever happened. We forget how desperate we were in our need. We forget how a moment of grace completely turns our lives around. We pray desperately for God’s intervention in our lives, the intervention happens, and then we behave as if God never does anything for us.

When people face crisis or tragedy, they quickly turn to God. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks hit New York City, churches across the United States were filled to overflowing. That new habit took place for a little while and then things petered out. People quickly forget their desperation for God and quickly return to their own comfort and self-interest.

² Burge, 187

People turn to God in the midst of crisis, then turn away once the crisis is over.

People surrender their lives to God when God answers desperate prayer. Then take their lives back as quickly as they set them down before the Lord.

God's intervention into our lives, miraculous or otherwise, does not always inspire change. It's more true that God's intervention doesn't **OFTEN** inspire change. "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." It's not menace. It's not a threat. Jesus speaks to the ease with which we forget God's goodness.

One of the most repeated commands of the Bible is to "remember." Ecclesiastes 12:1 declares: "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come."

Even though this man was paralyzed for 38 years, he was as likely as any of us to forget the mercy and grace and gift of God that transformed his life.

Do you want to live faithfully for God? Are you tired of handing your life over to God and then taking it back again? The solution to forgetting God's goodness is to remember. Remember what God has done and is continuing to do. Remember that Jesus, Emmanuel, God is with us is sufficient for your life. Remember you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, empowering and equipping you. Remember that God has extended grace to you, and that God will do it again.

What habits will help you remember the goodness of Christ. For some of us that weekly habit of going to church helps us remember the gifts of God. Some of us keep a thanksgiving journal, writing daily the things we're thankful for. Some of us have stories of God's goodness in your life that we repeat and retell. (Are people tired of your story? Who cares! Tell them, "I'm actively remembering the goodness of God.") Artwork is also a powerful means of memory. Often when I'm in someone's home, they'll point to a photo or painting of great significance, art that visually reminds them of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Once again in John, we see Jesus at work doing good things. He makes a man well, bypassing the usual superstitions to do so. Religious leaders grill the man about carrying his mat, showing they have long forgotten the goodness of God. Jesus tells the man, "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." The solution to not miss the goodness of God, to follow faithfully, is to remember.