

He is Marvelously Worthy (John 5:19-30)
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There is a significant emotional disconnect between the commercials we watch on TV and the circumstances of real life, especially during the holidays. Whether buying cars, buying iPhones, or discovering a new prescription drug, everyone on the screen is full of joy and cheer. I get it from an advertising standpoint. People don't want their products associated with doom and gloom. Marketing departments want us to think, "Maybe if I buy (fill in the blank) I'll feel like that person.

Most of us know better. The world is not brimming with happiness. It's riddled by viral pandemics, political rivalry, stillborn children, racial injustice, and financial stress, to name a few of the troubles around us. Add to their number the constellation of troubles within us: impatience, ingratitude, sinful anger, sexual infidelity, eating disorders, miscarriage, chronic illness, broken relationships.

Most people respond to trouble either by ignoring what's wrong or trying to fix what's wrong. And when we try to fix it, we default to one of two approaches. We board the social justice train, placing our hope in other people to make the world a better place. Or we board the self-improvement train, placing our hope in ourselves, in what we can do and accomplish to resolve the problems around us and within us.

Both efforts contain elements of wisdom, but as an ultimate hope for restoration and healing, they are woefully inadequate and spiritually deadly. Jer 17:5-6, "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength...he is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come." Whether the "man" in view is other people or yourself, we cannot make everything sad come untrue. Hope in man or a human institution – your parents, your spouse, our government – will inevitably disappoint.

In contrast, Jer 17:7-8 declares, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green." No matter the situation, the hope and help we need comes from God, not man, and is found in Jesus. That's the main point of Jn 5:1-18. Whether the healing you need is physical or spiritual, don't look to other people. Look to the Son of God. Look to Jesus. Two actions on his part in these verses affirm the wisdom of exchanging confidence in man for confidence in Christ.

1) JESUS DISPLAYS THE DECISIVE POWER OF HIS MERCY

The occasion for Jesus' trip to Jerusalem in v. 1 is an unnamed "feast of the Jews." It was the ancient equivalent of a holiday weekend, an extended time of national remembrance and thanksgiving for the Lord's goodness. Think crowds of people and abundant food and wine.

In the midst of the party, however, suffering remained. Roofed colonnades around the pool of Bethesda contained (v. 3) "a multitude of invalids." There were no hospitals, no disability checks, no government resources in Jesus' day. If you were an invalid, you were completely on your own, unless you were fortunate enough to have friends or family to care for you. Unable to work for a living, many were confined to lying on the ground, surrounded by filth, begging for food, completely dependent on the mercy of strangers. It was a pitiful and degrading existence.

John tells us in v. 5 that one man lying at Bethesda had been an invalid for 38 years. That's longer than many people lived back then. The exact nature of his physical illness is unknown. We know it was a chronic condition that prevented him from standing or walking. For all he knew, it would accompany him to the grave. Scripture is silent on what the old man was feeling that particular day, but not on Jesus' actions.

Look carefully at v. 6. The Lord's compassion is palpable. First, he sees the man "lying there." He may have been invisible to the world feasting all around him, but he was not hidden from God. The Lord perceived his suffering. He sees you too, friend.

Second, Jesus knows the man. He has yet to say a word to Jesus, but that doesn't mean the Lord is ignorant of the details of his situation. To the contrary, Jesus knew "he had already been there a long time." Sometimes we think that because God is eternal, unbound by time, he's probably unconcerned or emotionally indifferent to the toll of years of earthly sorrow. It's not true. Not a single day of suffering escapes his notice.

Finally, Jesus speaks to the man. He had the power to immediately make him well by the sheer force of his sovereign will. But that wasn't his approach. At least not here. He engaged the man relationally in the midst of his suffering through the gift of his word. No sympathetic solidarity from afar. Personal involvement through the pursuit of relationship. He's the same God today, friends, eager to engage with you through the power of his Word in the midst of your own suffering.

Jesus begins with a curious question: "Do you want to be healed?" Part of me says, "What are you thinking, Jesus? Of course, he wants to be healed! Fix his problem and move on to the next guy." It's not a dumb question. It's a brilliant question. Chronic physical suffering creates an enormous temptation to cynical resignation. "If God

wanted to heal me, he surely would have done it by now. I guess this is just going to be my lot in life. Thanks for praying, guys, but really, don't bother anymore. It is what it is. Que sera sera."

Jesus' words remind us God is after something far greater than alleviating our bodily ailments. He's interested in the condition of your heart, in the nature of your faith, in whether you are willing to look to him and keep on looking to him for the healing and deliverance he alone can provide. With a simple question, Jesus challenged the aging man to confess his need and cry out to the Savior standing in front of him for deliverance.

If this were a fairy tale, it's the sort of moment you expect the man to say, "Yes, Jesus, a thousand times yes. Please have mercy and heal my body! I know you're able." Cue the musical theme for the man of faith. Except this is not a fairy tale. It's reality. He's a man just like us. What does he say in v. 7? "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me."

The normally placid pool of Bethesda was rumored to have healing power whenever it became agitated by the supposed stirring of an angel. It's a ready example of superstition at its finest, which explains why all these invalids spent years hovering around the pool, believing that the first person to get into the water after it was "stirred" would immediately be cured.

The man's reply to Jesus' question is an implicit "yes." Yes, I want to be healed. But it's anything but an expression of faith in the Lord. To the contrary, his articulation of the problem and the solution is completely man-centered. What's the problem? I'm not healed because other people keep getting into the pool before I do. So what's the solution? I need someone who can lower me in at just the right time.

The one person who actually had power to heal him is standing in front of him, offering to help. But he doesn't ask Jesus. He goes off on what other people need to stop doing or start doing in order for him to be healed. We're more like him than we realize. Why can't my spouse (fill in the blank)? Why can't my boss (fill in the blank)? Why can't those people in that tribe with that skin color stop doing (fill in the blank)? If they would just stop being part of the problem and start being part of the solution, then my suffering would go away and I would be healed.

Regardless of purported healing powers of the water, were real people beating the man into the pool? Did he really lack a friend or family member who could lower him into the water? Absolutely. Selfishness hurts. Isolation makes it worse. His sorrows were real.

But here's the problem. When we focus primarily on what other people are doing or not doing, we start thinking of them as our functional savior. We lose our ability to see God or trust God (even if he's literally standing in front of us) because we've already elevated other people to his position. No matter what we "know" is true in our minds, we've chosen "them" as our god in our hearts, leaving no room for the One who actually is. "The behavior of men is the reason I'm suffering and a change in their behavior constitutes my only hope for deliverance." If you set your heart on the salvation that comes from men and you will blind yourself to the presence and power of God.

But praise God his supernatural work is not held hostage by our unbelieving idolatry! The man doesn't express any faith in Jesus' power to heal. Yet even that doesn't keep Jesus on the sideline, waiting for the linesman to hold up the substitute sign of human faith before can get in the game. Jesus creates an opportunity for us to exercise faith. He asks the man, "Do you want to be healed?" Then he sovereignly acts to awaken the very faith he requires.

In the greatness of his mercy, Jesus immediately heals this man by the word of his power. V. 8, "Jesus said to him, 'Get up, take up your bed, and walk.' And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked." Before this man even recognized Jesus, let alone asked him for healing, Jesus displays the decisive power of his mercy, miraculously intervening in his body. It's a picture of the gospel. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Friend, the healing and deliverance you need isn't something other people can provide. You need the Lord. You need Jesus. He is the only One who has the power to heal your body. And he's also the only One who has the power to heal your soul. When Jesus later found the man in the temple, what did he say in v. 14? "See you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."

Nothing worse? What could be worse than 38 years of lying helpless on a mat, especially if you live (like we do) in a world that worships physical health and wellness? There is something far worse. It's an eternity of righteous judgment in the fires of hell on account of your rebellion against the authority of God. Spiritual reconciliation in your relationship with God is your greatest need. It's a relationship sin destroys but Jesus makes new through the redeeming power of his life, death, and resurrection.

It's why Jesus urged the man to repent and believe, to turn away from doing life his way and walk the path of obedient trust in Jesus. Jesus demonstrated the decisive power of his mercy in the man's body so that he would recognize and trust him as the only one who could save his soul. A restored relationship with God through Christ doesn't

guarantee physical healing in this life, though there are many times Jesus delights to do so. It does guarantee the healing of our bodies in the life to come. Either way, healing comes from God, not man.

So if you're sick, friend, if all is not well in your body or soul, don't set your hope on finding the right doctor, going to the right counselor, reading the right Christian blog post, or praying the perfect prayer. Set your hope in Jesus! The Lord will use those means of grace to care for us. But take care lest you create a functional pool of Bethesda and disconnect God's power from his person. A man cannot heal you. Nor can you save yourself. Jesus is the one who heals. Jesus is the one who saves.

Against all forms of superstitious panentheism, the power of God is displayed in the person of the Son. Jesus delights to display the decisive power of his mercy.

2) JESUS ASSERTS THE TRUTH OF HIS DIVINE IDENTITY

The day Jesus healed the man was no accident. It was the Sabbath, the day of rest from our normal work instituted by God in Ex 20:10 as a weekly exercise in the humility of dependence. Keeping Sabbath was all about trusting God's power to save. For Jews in the first century, however, it had become something quite different. In an effort to avoid disobeying the command, they created 39 different classes of prohibited work, including picking up your bed.

So when Jesus healed the invalid at Bethesda, they didn't celebrate. They didn't rejoice. They were upset. V. 10, "So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, 'It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.'" Why did they see a legal violation instead of a miracle? For the same reason we miss out on the joy of experiencing God today.

Whenever we create our own rules to try and earn God favor, we stop trusting Jesus to save us and start trying to save ourselves. That's what legalism is, a futile attempt to earn God's love, acceptance, and approval through our obedience. The Jews in Jesus' day fell into the same trap. On the very day they were supposed to celebrate God's power to save (the Sabbath), they were focused on perfecting their own. The invalid looked to other people to save him. The Jews looked to themselves.

And when Jesus invariably broke the rules of their self-salvation project, they got angry. Why? Because his actions violated the perceived basis of their relationship with God. If I think something is deadly serious and you treat it as irrelevant, I'm not going to like you very much. V. 16, "And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was

doing these things on the Sabbath." V. 17, "But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I am working.'" What in the world does that mean? And why would Jesus say that to justify healing an invalid on the Sabbath?

First, when he spoke of God as "My Father," he claimed a unique and intimately personal relationship with Yahweh for himself. Leon Morris captures the stunning audacity of his assertion. "Jesus was not teaching that God is the Father of all. The Jews would have accepted that. His claim meant that God was his Father in a special sense. He was claiming that he partook of the same nature as his Father. That involved equality."

Second, Jesus claimed to be doing the exact same sort of work the Father did. When Jesus describes God the Father as "working until now," he flatly contradicts any deistic notion of God as a divine watchmaker who simply wound up the universe and cut it loose to tick. The sweet doctrines of providence – preservation, concurrence, and government included – are all bound up in v. 17 and the Jews would have agreed.

They held that God was not subject to the Sabbath law in the same way his people were. They knew from Gen 2 that God rested on the seventh day after six days of creative work. But that couldn't mean he stopped working. He clearly continued to uphold and sustain the universe, on the first Sabbath and every subsequent Sabbath. even on the Sabbath.

But Jesus didn't stop with saying God the Father "is working until now." He spoke of God as "My Father," and doubled down by identifying his work with the Father's work, claiming the same Sabbath exception for himself that the Jews recognized as belonging to God. D.A. Carson concludes, "Jesus insists that whatever factors justify God's continuous work from creation also justify his."

It wasn't a subtle defense of his actions. It was an implicit assertion of deity. And according to the most basic Jewish convictions of strict monotheism, it was blasphemy. V. 18, "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."

Jesus did something only God can do. He healed a crippled man by the power of his Word, displaying the decisive power of his mercy. And when the Jewish establishment questioned his authority, Jesus told them he had every right to do so because he was God. He doesn't leave it up to us to decide who we want him to be, not then and not today. He reveals and identifies himself as the Son of God, which leaves us with a



singular question, a question that lies at the heart of John's Gospel and a question he comes back to again and again.

Do you believe Jesus? Do you believe he is the Christ, the Son of God? Do you accept the identity he claims for himself and trust him accordingly or do you fail to recognize him as the Savior he is because you're too busy trying to save yourself?

CONCLUSION

In Jn 5, two different kinds of people, the crippled man and the Jews, each fail to recognize Jesus and the healing he alone can provide for the exact same reason. They think of salvation as the work of man. The invalid focused on the deliverance he thought other people could provide for him. The Jews focused on the deliverance they thought they could provide for themselves.

We readily succumb to the exact same error in our marriages, in our friendships, in our workplaces, in our church, and in our nation, friends. We don't perceive Jesus as the Savior or trust him as the Savior because we've already designated someone else as our functional Savior. If other people will stop treating me unjustly and lend me a hand, then I'll get the deliverance I need. If I can only manage to check all the right religious boxes and keep all the necessary rules, then I'll get the deliverance I need.

In either case, we need to hear the truth of Jn 5. No matter the situation, the healing we need comes from God, not man, and is found in Jesus. Jesus affirms as much by displaying the decisive power of his mercy and asserting the truth of his divine identity. Whether the trouble is around you or within you, don't look to other people. Don't look to yourself. Look to the Son of God. Look to Jesus. Cast your cares on him. Lean the weight of your life on him.

Ask him to restore your body. Ask him to restore your soul. The deliverance you need is something ultimately something only Jesus can provide. Trust in him will not be disappointed.