

## Do You Want to Get Well?

*These Things are Written that You May Believe Series*

**John 5:1-18**

Pastor Bryan Clark

So, I think we all understand that life can be really hard. I don't know what it is you're going through this morning; everybody has stuff. Maybe it's fear. Maybe it's anxiety. Maybe it's worry. Maybe it's physical pain. Maybe it's an addiction. Maybe it's a disease. Maybe it's financial. Maybe it's loneliness. Maybe it's despair. I don't know, but you know. So let's imagine that Jesus invited you to sit down at a table with a cup of coffee, and after you share whatever it is that's on your heart this morning, He looks you in the eye and asks you the question, “Okay, I hear you. Do you *want* to get well?” What would you say? Well, that's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to John, Chapter 5. The Gospel of John, chapter 5, verse 1:

**After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**

(\*NASB, John 5:1)

So, **after these things** could be translated *a little while later*. It's just to indicate there's been a passage of time. It's a good reminder that the Gospels are not day-to-day journals of the life of Christ. John isn't written that way, nor are the Synoptics. That's just not their intent. They're all building certain themes, and selectively recording stories and events in order to build that theme.

So the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—spend a lot of time talking about the Galilean ministry of Jesus, which is a significant portion of His ministry. John, on the other hand, talks very little about the Galilean ministry, and mostly about what happened down south around Jerusalem, and in Judea. So the text tells us that He's come to Jerusalem for a **feast**.

Now we don't know which feast this was. There were three primary feasts why the people traveled to Jerusalem. There was Passover and Pentecost, both of those were in the spring, and then there was Tabernacles, which was in the fall. It's really impossible to figure out which feast this is referring to. When people try to date the duration of the public ministry of Jesus, pretty much it's around Passover. So if this is Passover, then they think the public ministry of Jesus was about three and a half years. If it's not, then probably two and a half years, and there's no way to be certain about that. It's also helpful to understand that with the Passover, there was also a Sabbath. So there's an annual Sabbath as well as a weekly Sabbath and, again, it's hard to figure out which this is. It doesn't affect the meaning of the text at all. Verse 2:

**Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of those who are sick, blind, lame, and withered, (waiting for the moving of the waters; for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up the water, stepped in, was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.)** (Vs. 2-4)

So we're told that there's a pool by the sheep gate, which is kind of in the northeast corner of Jerusalem. One interesting detail is, for quite a long period of time, when skeptics read this in John's

Gospel, they concluded there was no such pool, and so they identified this as an error in the Gospel. About the latter part of the 19th century—about the 1880's—that part of the city was excavated. What do you know? They found a pool with five porches or porticoes, exactly as described in the Gospel of John. I've actually been at this site. I've seen the pool and the porches. It's quite a magnificent sight. When you read this, I don't know what you think of in your head, but it's not a small pool. It is actually, counting the porches and all, about the size of a football field. So, it's a pretty massive area, and that's why the text tells us there were *multitudes of people*. So, if this is feast time, Jerusalem would have been packed with people—multitudes of people—that were lame, that were sick, that were withered, that needed a healing. The belief was at certain seasons of the year, the angel of the Lord would come and stir up the water, and when that happened, the first one in the water would experience a healing.

Now, you'll notice halfway through verse 3, and all the way through verse four, that description is in brackets. The reason that's in brackets is to tell you that it wasn't in the oldest manuscripts—and typically we figure the oldest manuscripts to be the most reliable. So, it's believed that somewhere along the way, fairly early on, an editor added that in order to explain what was meant by verse 7, and I think that's probably correct. So, the editor simply put it in brackets as a way of telling you that's probably the case. But it's also helpful to understand pretty much all scholars believe that that was true. So even though it was added, it was historically accurate. That is what they believed. They believe that the angel came and stirred up the waters, and that's why all these people with needs hung around the pool, hoping for a miracle.

Now think of how really cruel this would be, if it was true. Those down by the pool that had the least wrong with them would be those physically able to get in the pool quickly. So, you can kind of imagine how this would perpetuate those with slight problems jumped in the pool, and believed in their head they were cured, and went on their way. But those with more serious issues, those that really needed help, simply were not physically able to get in the pool quick enough. And so, week after week, month after month, year after year, it was just one more reason for despair. It kind of creates this very difficult, hopeless atmosphere around this pool. Now the truth of the matter is that this pool was fed by springs, and certain times of the year these springs would discharge in a way that created some sort of movement and bubbling in the pool. It wasn't an angel of the Lord. That was just kind of silly, religious, superstition. But one of the things that happens when people are desperate—and we see this a lot today—they'll believe anything. So, as we've believed in relativism, as we've dismissed the idea of absolute truth, it opens up the door for people to believe pretty much anything. And the more desperate people get, the more confused they get, the more despairing they get, the more willing they are to believe the most ridiculous things. It's not that different today, and so that's what's happening when Jesus comes along. Verse 5:

**A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time *in that condition*, He said to him, “Do you wish to get well?”** (Vs. 5-6)

So, there's a man among the multitudes who doesn't pursue Jesus. Jesus finds him, and he's been sick for thirty-eight years. It's impossible to figure out what's really wrong with him. There's a lot of conjecture, but he's obviously very sick. Whether he's crippled or paralyzed, or whatever it is, we don't know. But stop and think about this. Thirty years before this moment that's recorded—he had already been sick for eight years at that time—and had no idea that just a few miles down the road on

that first Christmas night, the Savior of the world had been born. He would come to the pool and he would sit at the pool—no one can really figure out how long he was there—but given his condition, it's likely he probably was a beggar. It's likely he probably had been there for years and years and years and years, having no idea that what would bring his healing was not some silly religious superstition about the water, but some One who had been born just a few miles away, who would one day meet him at that pool and give him his miracle. For thirty years Jesus grew up, up in Nazareth! Yet this man would have had no idea that what he had been longing for was a Person who was born in Nazareth, who one day he would encounter. So Jesus encounters him and asks him, what again to us seems like a very odd question, **“Do you wish to get well?”**

Now can you imagine, if you're that person, it would be hard not to be a bit sarcastic back, wouldn't it? “Well, what do you think I'm doing down here? Of course, I want to get well!” But again, these questions are very provocative for a reason. Because essentially what Jesus is saying is, “Okay, listen to Me. You've been down here at the pool year after year after year after year, and it hasn't worked for you.” This is very much like the conversation Jesus has with the woman at the well when Jesus says to her, “If you just knew who it is that's talking to you, and the gift that I have to offer you.” That's what Jesus is essentially saying here, “Do you wish to get well? Because I'm telling you, you're not going to ever find that in this water full of religious superstition.” Jesus is going to offer him the only chance he has at healing.

Now, think about these themes that John develops. One of the interesting themes to think about is this whole theme of water as it's been presented in the Gospel of John. It starts back with John the Baptist, baptizing people in a baptism of repentance. And you remember, it is John himself that said, “This is only a ceremonial cleansing. This water can actually do nothing more than wash off the dirt. It's the One that comes after me that will have the power through His Holy Spirit to change you from the inside out.”

We move then to the story of the miracle at Cana—the water to wine. And we talked about the symbolism in that Jesus was taking the ceremonial water of the old covenant and turning it into wine, which was symbolic of His blood. He was there to turn water to wine, and what had been ceremonial, what had been part of the old covenant would now be fulfilled in Him—and that's where they would find the life that they're searching for. And we talked about how this is not going to be easy—to turn the water to wine.

We moved then to a discussion with Nicodemus, a self-righteous Pharisee, a person who would have been considered a very good, righteous man. But Nicodemus knew something was still missing and he's searching, and you remember Jesus says to him, “Nicodemus, you're never going to find what you're looking for in all this religion. You must be born again.” And what did He also say to him? “You must be born of...” [the what?] “the water and the Spirit.” And we identified the water as the baptism of John the Baptist, meaning you have to repent of this idea that you can make yourself righteous through religion. “You have to be born again. It's going to have to come through the Spirit of God; you're going to have to believe in Me.” And Nicodemus leaves, confused by that conversation.

Then we move to the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus identifies that if she just knew who He was and what He had to offer her, that what she needs is *living water*. She says, “Well, that would be nice. Then I wouldn't have to come up to the well every day.” Jesus says, “You're not getting this. I'm talking about a well of living water in your soul that will bubble up and give you new life.”

So now we move to the water of the pool at Bethesda, and here's this man who has been sick for thirty-eight years, thinking somehow, some way, this water is going to bring the healing that he longs for. So Jesus raises the question, and in verse 7, like Nicodemus, like the woman at the well, he just doesn't get Jesus:

**The sick man answered Him, “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me.”**

Now this man is going to be portrayed in this text as a rather unpleasant person, which may explain why there was no one to help him. He probably, by this time, was a bit of an outcast, and mostly ignored. He's still thinking, “The water will heal me if I just had someone to get me in the water first.” This is much like the woman at the well, “Oh, if you just give me that water, it'll make my life easier. I can pump water into my house.” And Jesus is essentially saying, “You just don't get it! That isn't what I'm offering you.” Verse 8:

**Jesus said to him, “Get up, pick up your palate, and walk.”**

Three commands, “**Get up, pick up, and walk.**” Now, think about maybe when you have the flu and are down for a couple of weeks. Just think about how quickly you become so weak. Imagine that for thirty-eight years! Whatever this man's issue was, he had to have been so sickly and frail, that even the possibility of getting up, let alone picking up his palate and walking off would have been impossible. This was not like the miracles you see on the religious channels on TV, where nobody can figure out exactly what was just healed. This is someone that everyone would have realized is sick, and has been sick for a long, long time. And immediately, in this moment, Jesus commands him, “**Get up, pick up your palate, and walk.**” Verse 9:

**Immediately the man became well, and picked up his palate and *began* to walk.**

(This wasn't something that happened over time. It was a miraculous moment, where we would say, “Wow, after thirty-eight years of suffering, it's time to rejoice. It's time to have a party!” But what does the text say?)

**Now it was the Sabbath on that day.**

(Oh, no! (*laughter*) I mean, you can hear what's coming, can't you? Jesus broke the rules, and now He's in so much trouble!)

The Sabbath goes all the way back to the six days of creation—*and on the seventh day God rested*. He didn't rest because He was tired. He rested because the work was done. This is the foundation of the concept. The Sabbath moves into the Law as one of the Ten Commandments. The idea was: On this day we rest. We worship God. We delight and celebrate in God, but we understand that on this day while we rest, God works. So, it's something the rabbi's taught. “God still works on the Sabbath.” The rabbis taught that babies are born; people die; the universe still functions—God works on the Sabbath—but we rest. This is the core issue with the Sabbath. We rest; God works. It was supposed to be a day of rejoicing and delight, but by the first century the religious leaders had turned it into a day of unimaginable bondage. There were thirty-nine categories of things you couldn't do on the Sabbath. Now, I didn't say thirty-nine *things*. I said thirty-nine *categories*! Every category had a list of things; it was just overwhelming bondage. Apparently, the rule was that you're not allowed to heal someone who's been sick for thirty-eight years on the Sabbath, so Jesus must be punished. Verse 10:

## So the Jews

(And in John's language that means primarily the Pharisees, the religious leaders.)  
**were saying to the man, who was cured.**

Notice as we go through this, John continually repeats, "*By the way, he was cured.* By the way, *he got his miracle*, in the midst of this conflict." It's also helpful to keep in mind that Jesus knew it was the Sabbath. I don't think there was a moment where Jesus went, "Oh, what was I thinking? It's the Sabbath." So, He intentionally picked this man out of a multitude of people, and He intentionally did it on the Sabbath to expose something, to make a point. So, they were saying **to the man who was cured**. Don't miss that part of it! They can't miss the fact it was a miracle. Somebody did a miracle here today. He *was cured*—but he's not supposed to be cured on the Sabbath. **So the Jews, saying to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your palate." But he answered them, "He who made me well was the one who said to me,**

(Again, the language, "*By the way, he was cured. He made me well.*")

**'Pick up your palate and walk.'**" (Vs. 10-11)

Now, this sounds a lot like Adam in Genesis 3, when God confronts him. You would think this man would have some level of appreciation for the fact that Jesus just cured him. But immediately he shifts the blame. "You know, it's the guy that cured me. He's the guy that caused all this. He's the guy that said it." Notice also the repetition of the words of Jesus as a way of saying, "It wasn't the pool that healed him. It wasn't the water. It wasn't the religious leaders." It was Jesus. It was when Jesus said, **"Get up, pick up your palate and walk."** That's the moment he was healed. There's no question Jesus is the one that did the miracle. Verse 12:

**They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up your pallet and walk?'" But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in *that* place.** (Vs. 12-13)

So again, the repetition, "Who cured you? Who said, 'Get up and walk?' Who did this miracle?" Wouldn't you think, at some point the religious leaders would stop and say, "Wait a minute! He did what?" But He broke the rule; that's all they can think about in this moment. They asked the man who He is, and the man's like, "I don't know, some guy." Now, wouldn't you think after thirty-eight years of sickness, if somebody healed you, you would immediately want to figure out, "Wait a minute, who was that? Who just did that to me?" But this guy doesn't know; Jesus slipped off. He's like, "I don't know. I don't even know His name." Now it's important to understand that what Jesus did was part of His plan and purpose in healing this man. It wasn't because the man had great faith. He didn't even know who Jesus was.

There are those today who would say that the basis by which you experience healing is whether or not you have enough faith. So basically, by believing hard enough, you manipulate the hand of God and you get your miracle. Let's think about that. Last week I went through a list of people that we prayed for, and honestly, I could have gone on for another hour listing people who did not get their miracle. Think about how cruel that theology is, to say to those people, "The reason you didn't get your miracle is because you do not believe enough!" In essence what you're saying is, "By the way, it's your fault." Or even beyond that, to the family and friends who pray so diligently, that same theology says to them, "By the way, the reason your loved one died is because you don't believe

enough. It's your fault." So, on top of all the grief and the pain and the suffering that people feel, there's a theology that says to them, "Oh, it's your fault. If you had believed more, you would have got your healing." So we're going to say to the parents of this little eight-year-old boy that's dying of cancer, "By the way, the reason he died is your fault." We have to understand how unbelievably cruel that theology is. There's nowhere the Bible teaches that! As a matter of fact, through knowing those stories and those people, many of those people were people with tremendous faith and courage—some of the most godly, faithful, courageous people I've known. Don't tell me they didn't have enough faith. I know the people around them that were praying so diligently. Do they believe God can do miracles? Absolutely! That's why they were praying. These are godly, faithful, mature believers, but God has a plan and a purpose, and you can't just override that by bearing down and believing so hard you can manipulate the hand of God. It's just terrible theology. This passage reminds us this was a healing of someone who didn't even know who Jesus was. He didn't even know His name. He was healed according to the plan and purpose of God. Verse 14:

**Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you."**

Some time passes—we don't know how much—and Jesus finds him in the temple. What exactly he's doing in the temple we aren't told, but I do think it's informative to what Jesus is saying. So again, Jesus makes a rather odd comment to him, "**Behold, you have become well.**" Jesus looks at him and says, "By the way, you do understand this, you're well! After thirty-eight years of sickness, you're well, and you do understand, don't you, that it wasn't the magic water; it wasn't the temple; it wasn't the religious leaders." Now think about the fact that these religious leaders had done nothing for this man. As a matter of fact, in first century Judaism, someone like this man would have been viewed as an outcast. They had nothing to do with him! They didn't help him; they didn't serve him; they couldn't do anything for him. Yet when he's miraculously healed, all they can do is criticize, "...because you broke a rule." So now he's up at the temple doing whatever, but what Jesus is saying is, "Okay, first of all you get this, don't you? You're cured! You haven't been cured for thirty-eight years, and the water didn't cure you. The temple didn't cure you. The Pharisees didn't cure you. Religion didn't cure you. I cured you. You do get that, don't you?" (That's the Bryan version of what he's saying there.)  
*(laughter)*

So when He says, "***Do not sin anymore, or something worse is going to happen to you,***" what is He really saying? There are a variety of opinions, but I think the thing that makes the most sense is that he is saying, "Yes, you were physically sick, and there's nothing you could do about it, and I came along and did for you what the pool couldn't do and what religion couldn't do. I healed you, but you do understand that there is a greater sickness, and that is your sin! And if you don't deal with your greater sickness, what lies ahead is going to make those thirty-eight years look like a walk in the park."

The Book of Isaiah records the words, "**By His stripes, you are healed.**" It's quoted again in 1 Peter, chapter 2. There are preachers—primarily prosperity preachers—that want to convince you that the reason Jesus died on the cross was so that you don't get sick. That's what Isaiah meant by **healed**. Again, let's think about that. This man was healed by Jesus, but he's still going to die. It's just putting off the inevitable. When he dies, there's a much more significant problem to deal with. If you go back to the beginning of Isaiah, Isaiah could not be clearer. The sickness is sin, and the healing is redemption. Whatever physical ailment you're struggling with in this life, trust me. It is a walk in the

park compared to what is to come if you don't deal with the greater sickness. Sickness is an image or a shadow of a greater sickness. Physical death is a shadow of a greater death—an eternal death—which is a spiritual death. So what Jesus was saying to him is, “You do get this, don't you? What the pool couldn't do for you, what the Pharisees couldn't do, or religion can't do for you, and what the temple can't do for you, I did for you! But you have a greater sickness, and that is your sin. And if you don't believe that I am the Messiah—and come to deal with your greater sickness—what lies ahead for you is far worse than anything you've experienced.” I think that's what he's saying to the man. Verse 15:

**The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.**

Now think about this. He knows the religious leaders are mad, and he knows they're mad at whoever it is that healed him. So now that he finds out it's Jesus, you would think he would be appreciative enough to slip into the crowd and disappear. Instead he actually, proactively, goes and finds the religious leaders and tells them, “Oh by the way, the one that violated your Sabbath was Jesus. Go and get Him!” It's right up there with Judas in terms of betrayals. But again, think about it. Jesus intentionally chose this man out of a multitude, and He intentionally chose to do this healing on the Sabbath. I think the man reflects the religious leaders and so many of the people. He just doesn't get it. Even when Jesus miraculously healed him, in that moment he has to choose between the religious leaders and Jesus, and he makes his choice. He just doesn't understand, or just chooses not to understand who Jesus is. Verse 16:

**For this reason the Jews were persecuting**

(could be translated prosecuting; it's actually a legal term)

**Jesus, (Why?)**

**because He was doing these things on the Sabbath.**

(These things, what? Healing a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years? How dare He heal this man and break their rules! He must be stopped!) Verse 17:

**But He answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I myself am working.”**

Now they would have understood the teaching of the rabbis: that God works on the Sabbath. “We rest; God works.” So the legal terminology: they're prosecuting Jesus. What is his defense? His defense is, “Hey, we all know God works on the Sabbath. That's why I was working on the Sabbath.” He's making a clear statement, “I'm God, and I work on the Sabbath, and this is what I do on the Sabbath. I heal sickness.” Again, there's an imagery on that, **on the Sabbath**. In other words, the fulfillment of the Sabbath would be that God would do the work, and we would rest in the work that God would do.

We talked about this when we went through Hebrews. There's no longer a temple. There's no longer a sacrificial system. There's no longer ceremonial water and there's no longer the Sabbath. It's a day of the week. Why? Because Jesus has fulfilled it. The fulfillment of the Sabbath is Jesus did the work on the cross, and we rest in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. We live in the fulfillment of what Jesus has done. To continue to believe in the Sabbath, as it was presented in the old covenant, is no different than continuing to go to the temple and offer sacrifices. There's no reason for that. It's been fulfilled in Christ. So that's what Jesus was saying, “I work on the Sabbath, because I'm God.” Verse 18:

**For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.**

They understood what He was saying. Jesus is going to again make His case, provide the witnesses that He is indeed, God in the flesh. We'll talk about that next week.

As we wrap this up this morning, I want to go back to our question. It's the question Jesus asked this man who had been sick for thirty-eight years, believing this silly superstition that if he's the first one in the water after it's stirred up, he's going to be healed. And, essentially what Jesus was saying is, "Hey, how's that working for you? Do you want to get healed? Because I'm just telling you right now, it's not going to happen in the water. It's not going to happen at the temple. It's not going to happen by keeping the Sabbath. It's not going to happen by a bunch of religious activity." What Jesus was trying to get them all to understand is, "The only possibility for true eternal healing is through a Person, the One who had come to be the Savior of the world. So, Jesus is asking the question, "Do you want to get well?"

Over the years I've just been amazed at how many people are so unhappy, so fearful, so anxious, so despairing, so miserable, but they won't turn to Jesus. Jesus sits down at the table and says, "Do you want to get well or not? How's your way working for you? I'm offering you what you need." And how many people, like the man in the story, just don't get it, and they walk away. So Jesus is asking the question, "*Do you want to get well or not?*" The ultimate disease all of us have is our sin, and the ultimate miracle all of us need is new life in Christ, the forgiveness of our sin, that we might stand right before a holy God. Without that, whatever it is you're going through in this life, trust me, it is a walk in the park compared to what is to come. I can't tell you that you're going to get your miracle in this life when it comes to your illness or your struggles. I can tell you that the ultimate miracle you need is offered freely as a gift to anyone who receives it. I also know that once you have encountered new life in Christ, Jesus promises He'll give you whatever you need to get through the stuff you face in this life, with a hope of a glorious future. That's what He offers. So when Jesus says, "Do you wish to get well?" it's what He's asking. Why would anyone say, "No," to that? Why would we not receive the gift that is so freely offered? That *is* the whole point of Christmas:

*"For unto you is born this day in the city of David, (a what?) a Savior, Christ the Lord!*

*Our Father, we celebrate this morning that for all of us, when we are lost in our sin with no hope, two thousand years ago You sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. God, ultimately the only answer to what we most desperately need is Jesus. Lord, help us to understand and receive what is so freely given in Jesus' name, Amen.*

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## **Do You Want to Get Well?**

*That You May Believe*

John 5:1-17

Pastor Bryan Clark

### **Opening Discussion**

1. If people today really want to get well (forever), Jesus offers them this life freely to those who receive it. Why do people reject this gift? List as many reasons as you can.
2. What would be the “pool” today where people gather to “get well.”
3. Who are the “Jews” today who conflict with Jesus and what He has to offer?

### **Bible Study**

1. Read John 5:1-15. Why do you think Jesus picked this particular man out of the multitude of those who were sick? Why did Jesus pick this man and heal him on the Sabbath?
2. One theme that ties many of these early stories together is water. See if you can identify all the water related themes so far in John’s Gospel.
3. Why do you think Jesus asked the man if he wanted to get well? What point was He trying to make? Who would He ask that question to today? The man thought if he could just get in the pool. What might people say to Jesus today? Yes, I want to be healed if I could just...?
4. Compare Jesus’ words in verse 14 with His words in John 9:1-5. What was Jesus saying in verse 14? Also compare Matthew 9:1-8 and John 8:1-11. How are these other stories alike and how are they different as they relate to the sin issue?
5. Jesus obviously intended to heal on the sabbath to reveal something the people needed to understand. What was that? What did Jesus give as His reason for working on the sabbath according to John 5:17?

