

Text: John 5:1-16

Title: Believe because Jesus healed and warned a lame man

Time: 6/2/2024 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Joni Eareckson Tada became a quadriplegic after a diving accident in the Chesapeake Bay at the age of 17. On July 30th of this year, it will have been 57 years that this sister in Christ has lived with her paralysis. In addition to her immobility, she has lived with terrible chronic pain resulting from her condition. And in 2010 she began a prolonged cancer battle, finally becoming cancer-free in 2019.

I listened to a 2014 talk she gave called "Deeper Healing." She recounted those early days in the hospital and described her overwhelming desire to be healed. When a visitor would come to her hospital room and offer to read the Bible to her, she would always ask that our passage, John 5, be read. She wanted to be healed the way the lame man of our passage was healed.

But in her talk, Joni explained that though she still suffers physically, the Lord has used that suffering in her life to accomplish what she calls a "deeper healing." This "deeper healing" is the true teaching of John 5.

The Apostle John writes about the healing of a lame man that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we might have life in His name (20:31). In Joni's case, she was never healed of her paralysis, but she wonderfully came to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and to have eternal life in His name. In the case of this lame man of John 5, he is healed physically, but tragically He cares little about believing on Christ or truly understanding who He is.

As we read through the passage, we see that John tells us first about a question Jesus asks the lame man about his suffering, and then next about a warning Jesus gives the healed man about his continuing sin. Those will be our points this morning.

I. Jesus questions the lame man about his suffering (vv. 1-9).

Illustration: One of the objections critics once had to the pool described in our passage is the description of its five porticos or porches. Five-sided or pentagon pools are unknown to Jerusalem archeology, and so unbelieving critics claimed that this passage was evidence that the Gospel of John was written long after the first century by someone who was unfamiliar with Jerusalem's topography.

As has happened repeatably, however, archaeologists did find the Pool of Bethesda in the 19th century, and they came to understand John's five-portico description too. This pool is a rectangle with a portico on each of its four sides, but it is divided in half by a fifth portico, so the pool is comprised of two separate basins, which are indeed accessed through five different porticos. The Apostle John knew exactly the pool he was talking about when he wrote this chapter.

More recently, a copper scroll was found in the caves of Qumran - part of the Dead Sea Scroll collection - that dates to between 25 and 75 A.D., and that scroll refers to the Pool of Bethesda. Interestingly, the scroll names *Bethesda* with the Hebrew dual form, indicating that that the pool was a pair of basins. Again, John understood which place he was writing about. Scripture is inerrant. We need to be willing to wait for more evidence at times when critics are putting forth their proposals for denying the truth of Scripture.

Application: But John did not write this passage to tell us about a place called Bethesda or about its five-portico pool. He wrote this passage to tell us about the Lord's miraculous healing of a man whom He knew to have been crippled for thirty-eight years. What we see here is that Jesus cared for the man's condition with divine omniscience and omnipotence coupled with divine compassion.

Which brings us to the question Jesus asks the lame man about His suffering (v. 6, "Do you want to be healed?"). The man's answer simply replies that his healing was not possible for some unusual reasons (v. 7). The end of verse 3 and verse 4 explain what the lame man was talking about. They tell us that at a specific time an angel would stir the waters of the pool and the first one in the pool after the stirring would be healed.

You may have noticed that when we read this passage in the ESV, the last phrase of verse 3 and verse 4 were missing. That is because they are missing in some of the ancient Greek manuscripts we have of the Gospel of John. Others have these verses, and all the manuscripts have verse 7. So in the providence of God, we are left with the question of whether the passage in question was included in the original manuscript authored by John or not.

As we address that question, it is important that we see that this is a very different question from the one about whether the pool existed in Jerusalem. Critics who said that the identification of the pool was a mistake were denying the inerrancy of the original autograph. They claimed that the Gospel of John could not be trusted because it was not really written by the Apostle John. On the contrary, with our question about verses 3b and 4, we affirm that every-

thing that John wrote was inerrant and verbally inspired, whatever conclusion we might reach as our answer.

So, when it comes to the difference between the KJV and the ESV, good men who believe in the inerrancy of what John originally wrote have come to different conclusions about whether he wrote verse 4 and the end of verse 3 as they have studied the manuscript evidence.

I am no expert when it comes to Greek manuscripts, but for reasons I cannot get into this morning, I believe that the verses are original and were removed by later copyists. So I think that the KJV has the text correct, that there was an angel who stirred the waters with the effect that the first one in the pool was healed. Certainly, the lame man believed that this is the way healing at the pool of Bethesda worked.

Application: Jesus, of course, could do more for this man than the angel of verse 4 had been able to do. He has compassion for the sick that no angel has, and He has the power to heal that no angel has.

He could see the suffering of the sick at the pool when everyone else was focused on the feasting of the feast. He could see people at the pool and not just sheep at the Sheep Gate. He understood the true righteousness that exceeds the false righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees of His day.

And so on the Sabbath, Jesus tells the paralytic of thirty-eight years, "Arise, take up thy bed, and walk" (v. 8). Immediately, this man was healed in a way that Joni and all the other sick people at the pool that day were not healed (v. 9).

As we pray for Jesus to heal our bodies, this account teaches us two things about our Lord. First, He has the power to heal immediately, whether He does so or not. And second,

He often does not heal because He has a purpose that is more important to Him than the healing of our bodies. Jesus asked the lame man about his suffering. The lame man wanted his legs to be healed, but Jesus wanted him to want more.

II. Jesus warns the healed man about his sin (vv. 10-16).

Illustration: What Joni believes about her deeper healing is perhaps best summarized by what she said about what it was going to be like to go to heaven and be made whole in her Savior's presence:

"So don't be thinking that for me in heaven the big deal after I get to see Jesus is to get my new body. No, no, no. I want a glorified heart. I want a glorified heart that no longer twists the truth, resists God, looks for an escape, gets defeated by pain, becomes anxious or worrisome, [or] manipulates my husband with precisely timed phrases."

Application: It becomes clear as we read the rest of this passage that the lame man who was healed never experiences this deeper healing of the heart.

Instead, he is confronted first by some Jewish authorities who catch him carrying his bed roll on the Sabbath. There were Old Testament prohibitions for the nation of Israel against carrying things on the Sabbath (Jer. 17:21f.), but these laws were designed to prevent commerce on the day the Lord set apart for their rest.

The truth behind the Scriptural law was simply that you cannot serve God and money (Matt. 6:24, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon).

The Old Testament Jew had to choose on the Sabbath which one he was going to worship, God or money. As New Testament Christians, we have to make the same choice on our Sundays (Heb. 10:19-25).

The healed man was not trying to make money instead of resting, but the Pharisees still cared more about the fact that he was carrying his bed roll than that he had been healed after having been lame for 38 years. They will come to hate Jesus for healing people on the Sabbath.

In false churches all over America today, the miraculous works of the Lord Jesus Christ are denied and ignored in the same way. He is remembered as an effeminate Jewish moralist whose example teaches us to be nice to everyone. He is not known as Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who made this man walk for the first time in 38 years. When modernist churches deny the supernatural power of Jesus Christ, they have no hope of experiencing the deeper healing that Jesus's warning points this healed man to.

Jesus's warning is in verse 14. He uses the present tense here, so we can translate, "No longer continue in your sin in order that something worse not happen to you." Tragically, we do not read that the healed man heeded this warning. We read instead that he went to the Jewish authorities and reported to them that it was Jesus who had healed him. And because of that report, the Jewish authorities persecuted Jesus over His disregard for their false Sabbath rules.

After some careful thought, it becomes clear that this healed man continued sinning, and that something worse tragically did happen to him. What sin did he continue in? What could be worse than being lame for 38 years? We have our answers when we remember the reason John wrote his

Gospel, including this passage before us – that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing have life in His name.

What is worse than being physically lame for 38 years is failing to have eternal life in Jesus's name. Eternal death is much worse. The sin that the lame man continued in was the sin of his unbelief. He did not believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Instead, he sides with the Jewish authorities in their rejection of Him.

Conclusion: How shall we respond to Jesus's warning to the lame man? Shall we side with false churches today that deny that He is the Christ, the Son of God? Or will we bow before Him as our Lord and Savior praying, "Lord, I believe." That was the saving prayer of the healed blind man of chapter 9 (v. 38), a very different outcome than the one we are reading about here.

At one point in her journey, Joni and her husband Ken had the opportunity to visit the pool of Bethesda. When they happened upon the pool, Joni said to Ken: "O, Ken, you would not believe how many times I used to picture myself here as one of those people with disabilities." Ken went down to inspect the pools more closely, and Joni was left alone in prayer with her Savior.

She prayed, "O Jesus, thank You, thank You for a *no* answer to a request for physical healing. You really knew what you were doing so many years ago, because a *no* answer to a request for physical healing has purged so much sin out of my life, so much selfishness and bitterness, and I know I've got a long way to go, but every day I want to wake up and I want to be a different Joni than I was yesterday. I want to be a Joni that you created, that you've des-

tined me to be. O God, help me to step into that *no* answer, Lord Jesus, to a request for physical healing. It has meant that I am depending more on your grace, and it's increasing my compassion for others who are hurt and disabled. It has helped me put my complaining behind me. It stretched my hope. It pushed me to give thanks in times of sorrow. It has increased my faith. It has strengthened my hope of heaven, and it has made me love You so much more, so much more. It is such a safe thing to be welcomed into the inner sanctum of the fellowship of your sufferings. And I would not trade it for any amount of walking."

May the Lord grant us all this deeper healing of faith, love, and eternal hope.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*