

Text: John 5:1-15

Title: “Our Lord’s Heart for Hurting People”

INTRODUCTION

Take out your copy of the Scriptures. If you don’t have one we have them available as you walk in or in the pew rack. Read John 5:1-9. Pray.

ILLUSTRATION - In Bethesda, Maryland is one of the most important hospitals in the US ... Bethesda Naval Hospital, otherwise known as Walter Reed Medical Center. It’s one of the most prominent hospitals in the US because when our nation’s presidents are in need of surgery they most often are admitted to Bethesda Naval Hospital. It is to this hospital that many of our military men and women who are wounded in combat are brought for treatment of the trauma of battle. And during those times of war the President of the US will often visit the wards in Bethesda where the soldiers are being treated.

As we read in our Bibles today Jesus visited a place called Bethesda where hurting people were gathered. Bethesda means “house of mercy,” and hurting people need mercy. And Jesus, with a heart for hurting people, came to this place. He will always be where there are hurting people. And here Jesus will perform one of his remarkable miracles.

The Apostle John records seven such miracles in the Gospel that he wrote. We saw last week that later in John he explains why he included these miraculous signs in His account of the life and ministry of Jesus...

John 20:31 - But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

So what is it that we are supposed to see and believe about Jesus in light of this miraculous sign? We are to see...

1. OUR LORD’S COMPASSION FOR HURTING PEOPLE (John 5:1-6)

The text tells us that there’s a Jewish festival in Jerusalem, possibly the Passover, and Jesus goes there to take part in this important holy day. But He doesn’t go to the temple.

John 5:2 - 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.

Boys and girls, this evening we’re going to have a back to school party at Hawaiian Falls. When you go there you’ll see lots of people playing in the water having fun. Well this pool was not like Hawaiian Falls. Everyone there was suffering. People were not lying around on their beach towels getting a sun tan, they were lying on ragged mats or blankets. There were five porches around the pool where people could sit shaded from the hot sun. So this was a place of refuge for hurting people.

John 5:3 - Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed –

Perhaps you can see the hurting, disabled people lying everywhere around the pool. Perhaps you can hear their cries and groans.

You may wonder why so many hurting people gathered at this particular place. Well there was a superstition about this pool. The translation I'm reading from (NIV) leaves off part of v.3 and all of v.4. That's because the most reliable manuscripts the Bible was translated from don't include the last part of v.3 and all of v.4. They may have been added many years later to help fill in the blanks. You might find the omitted part in a note at the bottom of that page of your Bible.

John 5:3b-4 - (*and they waited for the moving of the waters. From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease he had.*)

The pools may have been fed by underground springs, and when those springs became active the water would begin to bubble and gurgle. For some reason people thought that when that happened an angel was stirring the water and the first one in the water was cured of their sickness.

So people were waiting for something that could never happen. And that's the way many people are ... waiting for the hurts to just go away. Our Savior has a heart of compassion for them.

John 5:5 - One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

So here was a man who had been so sick for so long he was too weak to stand on his own two feet. We're not told why he couldn't walk, but it had defined his life for 38 long years.

ILLUSTRATION – A couple of months ago I was working in my study and I looked out the window and saw a man climbing into one of the trash dumpsters we use. I wondered if he was dumpster diving for junk, or if he was looking for food. As I watched him I realized he was foraging for food. When I walked outside to see if I could help him he held up some stale cookies he had found in the trash. My heart broke for him. I asked him if he would let me help him get some real food. As we walked I found out his name was Juan and that he was homeless. In fact, he lives behind the abandoned theater across the street. He went on to tell me that he had just been released from prison, recovering from addiction and he was on the streets because he didn't feel safe in the homeless shelters. Except for his time in prison he had lived in this part of town for most of his life. Then I could see tears welling up in his eyes. He said, "Some days I see myself twenty years ago, roaming the same streets, looking for food in the same places. *I'm just like a stray dog running around from place to place.* We stopped right there in the middle of the parking lot and I said, "Juan, I'm going to get you some food, but there's something you need more ... *someone* you need more." I shared the Gospel with him and he bowed his head with tears flowing down his cheeks and opened his heart to Christ.

There are hurting people all around us. They're crippled by an addiction they can't overcome ... crippled by a fear they can't overcome ... crippled by a hurt they can't overcome ... crippled by abuse. Many have given up hope that things could change. And Jesus sees them.

John 5:6a - Jesus saw him lying there and learned (lit. "knew) that he had been in this condition for a long time...

If you or I would walk up to a place like this we would be overwhelmed. We wouldn't even know where to start because we have no idea what is going on in each life. But that's not so with our compassionate Savior. Before the man could tell Jesus his story, Jesus already knew his condition. You need to know that when you meet Jesus this is the kind of person you meet. He knows us inside and out. He knows everything you've ever felt or done. He knows your past; He knows your future. And the amazing thing is that He still loves you.

So we are to see our Lord's compassion for hurting people, but also we are to see...

2. OUR LORD'S CHALLENGE TO HURTING PEOPLE (John 5:6-8)

John 5:6 - 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?"

There were no magical powers in the pool when the waters were stirred. The man's hopes were false hopes, and Jesus knew it. So Jesus challenged him with a question ... "Do you want to get well?"

Now we might think this is a meaningless question. What person in this man's condition wouldn't want to get well? Sometimes a person's identity can be so connected to their weakness that they can't imagine living without it.

ILLUSTRATION – British evangelist Nicky Gumbel tells about a funeral he once did for an elderly woman who was known in the community as a "bag lady." For years she had roamed the streets begging for whatever she could get from others. Nicky Gumbel said that he didn't expect many people at her funeral. But a fellow pastor who was sharing the funeral responsibilities with him said that actually the woman had inherited millions of dollars many years earlier so there would be lots of relatives show up for obvious reasons. After the funeral, Nicky asked one of the family members why this woman lived as a beggar, even though she was a multi-millionaire. They told him, "She didn't want to give up the only life she had ever known." She didn't want to "get well"?

Jesus asked, "Do you really want to get well?" And the man answers by growling out several excuses:

John 5:7 - "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."

Everything seems to be set against him. Do you ever feel that way? No matter how hard you try you can't seem to get ahead. Well Jesus can overcome all of that, and He challenged the man with a question, but then with a command.

John 5:8 - Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”

Interesting! Jesus commanded the man to do what he could not do in his own strength. Notice that Jesus never touched the man. The healing came by the word of Jesus, just like we saw with turning the water to wine and the healing of the royal official’s son last week. Jesus’ word is power. Every command is a promise that in God’s strength it can be done. You might not be able to do it in your own strength, but if Jesus says do it, you can do it in His power and grace. You see, there was something compelling about the command of Jesus that moved the man to attempt the impossible ... to stand on his feet, take up his mat and walk. That’s the power of the word of God.

So the compassionate Savior meets us where we are. The challenging Lord then moves us on to the next level. But there’s something else we need to see about Jesus.

3. OUR LORD’S CURE FOR HURTING PEOPLE (John 5:9-15)

John 5:9 - At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath,

Immediately the man was healed. Just imagine. Thirty-eight years of weakness and misery reversed in an instant. That’s the power of Jesus. That’s how quickly He can change a life.

This healing was all Jesus. This man didn’t cry out for help; he had given up hope that anyone would or could ever help him. In fact, at this point he didn’t even know who Jesus was, much less believe in Him. And here is the grace of Jesus ... coming to us when we can’t change ourselves, when we have lost all desire or hope to change.

But this isn’t the end of Jesus’ healing. There’s a deeper healing that the man needs, and Jesus knows it.

Because Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders were upset and they hassled the man who had been cured for carrying his mat. Can you imagine that? These hyper-religious people were so concerned about rule keeping that they couldn’t rejoice that a man had been healed. He said, “I was just doing what I was told by the man who healed me.” The Jewish leaders said, “Well where is he?” The man turned around, but Jesus had slipped away in the crowd. But later Jesus found the man and continued the conversation with him.

John 5:14 - 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.”

The man’s greatest need was not for physical healing. His greatest need was for spiritual healing. He had been cured, but he was still lost, and Jesus went after him. We’re not given the details, but obviously this man had a sinful lifestyle. His greatest problem was his sin problem. If he’s not healed physically he will experience physical death. If he’s not healed spiritually he will experience spiritual death ... separated from God for eternity in a very real place called hell.

In fact, a few verses later Jesus will use this occasion to proclaim the awesome truth about Himself.

John 5:24 - "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

Sadly, as far as we know, this man walked away without crossing over from death to life. He walked away with a healed body, but with a lost soul.

QUESTION: Are you like this disabled man? If so, I don't want you to walk away without Jesus, without crossing over from death to life.

Just think about what the grace of Christ enables us to do. Jesus commands us to leave a harmful habit and then gives us the transforming grace to do it. Jesus commands us to turn loose of the hurts we've been hiding behind and then He gives us the transforming grace to do it. He commands us to face our crippling fears with courage and then He gives us the transforming grace to do it. He commands us to lay down our lives, take up our cross daily and follow Him, and then He gives us the transforming grace to do it.

QUESTION: Are you like Jesus, with a heart for hurting people, or are you more like the religious leaders who were more concerned about keeping the rules than about hurting people. I don't want you to walk away from Jesus today.