Do You Want to be Healed?

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[0:00] We're going to read together in John's Gospel. We're reading in John chapter 5, the first 18 verses of the chapter.

It's page 890 of the Church Bible, if you want to follow there. The readings also in some of the intimation leaflets, there's orders of service and the readings there also.
So John chapter 5, reading from verse 1 to verse 18. Let's hear and read together in God's Word.
After this, there was a feast of the Jews and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
Now, there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, and paralyzed.
One man was there who had been an invalid for 38 years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, Do you want to be healed?
[1:10] The sick man answered him, 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.

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.
Now, that day was the Sabbath. So, the Jews said to the man who had been healed, It is the Sabbath, and it's not lawful for you to take up your bed.
But he answered them, The man who healed me, that man said to me, Take up your bed and walk.
They asked him, Who is the man who said to you, Take up your bed and walk?
Now, the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, See, you are well.
[2:11] Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you. The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. And this is why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

But Jesus answered them, My father is working until now, and I am working. 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.
This is the word of God, and to his name be the praise and the glory. I don't know about you, but when I was in school, we were told there was no such thing as silly questions.
Anything is fine to bring before the teacher. The teacher's happy to deal with any queries you might have. Maybe it was just my school, but it did feel like there were, in fact, a lot of silly questions.
But we are in a series, a preaching series, called questions that Jesus asked. And as David has just read for us, we read about a man, Jesus comes and finds this man who's been lying by a healing pool for a long time.
[3:32] He's incredibly sick. He can't walk. He's in a pretty bad way. He's hoping for miraculous healing. And Jesus comes up to him and says, Do you want to be well?

And it seems to me, at least on first reading, that Jesus is actually breaking the there are no silly questions. Rule. Of course, this man wants to be well. He's been lying there for a long time, 38 years, hoping, just hoping that somehow his paralysis, his paralysis is going to be cured and he's going to be able to walk.
We think, and this is what four years of seminary teaches you. Jesus doesn't ask silly questions. And in fact, Jesus sometimes asks questions, the kinds of questions that are so clear and so precise, they pierce right to the heart of the human condition.
And I think this is one of those questions. It's a diagnostic question. It doesn't prompt a one word answer. The man doesn't say yes. The man doesn't say no. But he reveals so much about who this

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man really is, how he sees the world that he is inhabiting, where his hope is and where it isn't.
I want to show you tonight, this isn't a silly question at all. It's a question that Jesus is still asking today, not to a man lying on a mat 2000 years ago, but to all of us here in Edinburgh tonight.
[4:59] We all know people in need of physical healing. Some people are in very urgent of miraculous healing. We know, and we pray for them.

But even if you're relatively well, even if you were able to, you know, run up the steps from the car park today, you don't have to look too far to see things that you need to be healed from.
You can see the brokenness of the world, the fragility of our mental and emotional health. You know that human relationships are fragile. They're so easily broken and so difficult to heal.
You've experienced disappointments. You've experienced suffering. You've seen greed. You've seen envy. You've seen hurt. You don't need to be a Christian to know that we all need healing from all of these things.
The story of Jesus healing an invalid by the pool goes beyond our need for physical healing. It offers true healing because true healing doesn't just patch us up for a while.
[6:05] True healing is complete. It offers deep, eternal rest from ever needing to go looking for healing again. So this passage doesn't just tell us about the wonderful healing.

Also points us clearly to the source, where this healing comes from. And it's not a pool. It's a person. I've got three points. The first point is, what's wrong with you?
John goes up to, John tells us that Jesus is going up to a festival. And there he comes to the Sheep Gate and there's a pool, a pool called Bethesda.
For a long time, people who wanted to discredit the Bible kind of hung on this pool and said, there's no evidence that this pool actually ever existed. Notice that the passage tells us this pool has five porticos.
Those are porches. And they offered shelter from the sun and the heat for those who were lying around them. So we all know, don't we, that swimming pools are only rectangular, oval, maybe a circle.
[7:10] Nobody's ever heard of a pentagon shaped pool. There's no archaeological evidence that this pool ever existed. And John's really specific about where it is, right beside the Sheep Gate.

It had never been discovered until it was. And finally, it was uncovered relatively recently in the 19th century. Archaeologists think that this wasn't necessarily a healing pool, like it's been treated by this man, but it was probably a Jewish ritual cleansing pool.
There were, when it was excavated, they found that there was a rectangular pool. So rectangular pool has four sides, right? Four porches, except there was two separate basins.
So the top pool would flow into the second pool. And across the middle, there was this wall, which had a porch. And there we have it, five porches, a five porched pool.
And it proves exactly what Jotun was writing about is true. So why does that even matter? Why does it matter? Why does it need to be a real pool? Isn't the most important bit, the bit that Jesus does?
[8:22] Well, yes, the most important bit is the bit that Jesus does. But if we can trust the Bible to be completely accurate about a five-sided pool that people never thought existed, and the detail that goes into describing exactly what that is, then we can trust the Bible to be really crystal clear about the big important things that it tells us, like we're going to see tonight who Jesus really is.

So Jesus comes to this pool of Bethesda. Bethesda means something like house of mercy or house of grace, which is bitterly ironic because it doesn't seem as though there's much mercy or grace in this place.
It's full of people lying around completely debilitating, debilitated, waiting for a miraculous healing. There's no grace in this place at all until Jesus shows up.
And then amongst this sea of sick people, Jesus identifies one man, an invalid. He's lying on his mat, probably like a reed mat that you can roll up. And he's been there a long time.
But John tells us that Jesus didn't need to be told any of this because he already knew exactly what the man's condition was. So the passage doesn't tell us exactly what the man's disability was, what was specifically wrong with him.
[9:45] He had a weakness and he couldn't walk. But it does show us that there's more to this man's condition than his physical ailment. John's one of four gospels and they all tell the story of Jesus's life, but they come at it from slightly different angles.

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John's a very precise writer. He's really clear about what he does. And he doesn't usually include specific details by accident. I think he's deliberately told us that this man's been ill for 38 years. And I think that that number is one of the keys for us unlocking the meaning of this whole episode that Jesus has. Because we find this exact number in a very particular place in the Old Testament. So in Deuteronomy, we read about how God had brought the children of Israel to the edge of the promised land. Right to the edge.
The land that he promised to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to these people's forefathers. And they came right up to the edge, but they didn't get to go in. They weren't allowed to enter the land of rest. [10:53] They had to wander in the wilderness for years and years first. How many years? 38 years. They had to wander in the wilderness for 38 years until all the people who were guilty of not putting their trust in God had died.

And it was their descendants who were to enter the land. They weren't allowed to enter the land because of unbelief. They simply didn't trust God to deliver on the things that he promised them he would.
And I think this is the connection. This is one of the connections John wants us to make between this man and Israel. This man is suffering.
He's been suffering for a long time in a really terrible way. But underneath his suffering, underneath his physical suffering, is a spiritual sickness.
Notice too that Jesus comes to this man twice. So he comes to him by the pool and he sees him when he's unwell. But Jesus has also come to him later on.
[11:57] He comes to him at the temple. And Jesus' words there, the words that he says to him are important as well. In verse 14, Jesus says, See your well.

Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you. Jesus is linking the man's physical condition to sin. So he's not doing it in a mechanical way.
He's not saying, if you sin, you're going to get sick. A few chapters later, John chapter 9, Jesus explains that that's, you know, the idea of suffering isn't always directly connected to punishment for sin.
But Jesus is showing this man, he's showing us, there's a need for greater healing, even greater healing than being paralytic for 38 years.
The final thing to notice on this is that this need for a different kind of healing is in verse 4. John says, there are multitudes of sick, blind, lame, paralyzed people all around him.
[13:05] And when we've read the Bible and we look at that, we see this is a clear picture of the fallen world under the effects of sin. This man's physical weakness is not his biggest problem.

His biggest problem is spiritual helplessness. And this man's physical condition, it mirrors the spiritual condition of all of humanity apart from Christ.
Apart from Christ, Christians, human beings are in a perilous situation. You might not have physical ailments holding you back, but in Ephesians, Paul tells us that apart from Christ, we're not simply unwell, we're not simply off key, we're dead in our sins.
Not limping, not weak, spiritually dead. And that's the diagnosis. That diagnosis is much more serious than paralysis.
So Jesus sees this man, he sees through his presenting symptoms to diagnose his spiritual desperation. condition. We don't know exactly what the condition of this man's legs are, but that's not really what this is about.
[14:27] It's about the condition of his heart. And it's the same for each of us. The problem of sin is universal. Everyone, all the multitudes lying in the porches, all five porches around this pool, they had it, they had the same condition.

Each of us has it too. But saying that you've got a sin problem is not an insult. It's a mercy because you have to know what's wrong in order to know where to go to be healed or more accurately, who to go to.
So we have a diagnosis for this man, for ourselves. And this is when Jesus asks the question that with our understanding of what sin is and the same condition can pierce us in the heart.
When we read on, when we read, Jesus says, do you actually want to be healed? Do you want to be well? And when we first read this, it feels a bit confronting, I think, confusing perhaps.
This guy's at rock bottom. Of course he wants to be well. It almost sounds cruel. So this, you can imagine this poor guy is kind of dragging himself unable to walk and somebody else is getting down

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and achieving healing before him.
[15:43] If you think about it in those terms, it's like Jesus is saying, you're not working hard enough. Go harder, go faster. But that's not what's happening at all. Jesus is asking this question to expose the deeper reality.

And when you look at the man's answer, I think it reveals to us a lot. So first of all, look at what the man doesn't say. He doesn't actually give a direct answer to the question.
Instead, he explains why it's impossible for him to be healed. He says he doesn't have anyone to help him and other people are more mobile than he is.
So these things might be true. I'm sure these things are true. But why doesn't he simply say yes? Why doesn't he say, yes, I do want to be healed. He could say, stranger, please, you've come up and spoken to me.
Hang about a bit just in case the water is troubled and you can help me to the water and I can get well. But he doesn't say that. And I think that reveals so much about his attitude to life and the identity that he has.
[16:48] So for 38 years, this guy has been the invalid. His whole identity is wrapped up in helplessness. He's learned to explain his condition away to people rather than hold out hope for real change.

In the film The Shawshank Redemption, Brooks is the elderly librarian. He's been in prison for 50 years and eventually Brooks gets parole and he leaves prison and he doesn't last very long and he can't handle life on the outside and he takes his own life and he leaves a suicide note and it says that at first the walls of prison felt confining but eventually he became so familiar with them that he couldn't imagine life outside them.
One of the lead characters in the film, Red, he's played by Morgan Freeman. He says, at first you hate the walls around you and then slowly you get used to them and given enough time you come to depend on them.
Enough years imprisoned and a person stops being able to function anywhere else. And do you see it isn't that the man enjoys his broken condition.
It's that 38 years is enough time for him to have built an entire existence around his illness. His habits, his spot under the porch, his place in the begging order perhaps.
[18:24] So when Jesus says to him, do you want to be healed? The question isn't true and it isn't silly, it's surgical. Jesus is asking if this man actually is ready to lose the whole, everything of life that he knows in exchange for a life that he can't even imagine.

Jesus is asking him, do you want to build an entire life from scratch, leaving every aspect of your old life behind? And that's scary. I wonder if you can see elements of this man's situation in your spiritual life.
Are there patterns of sin in your life that have become so ingrained that you can't see a way of leaving them behind? Maybe you're caught in apathy, in your devotional life, your prayer life, your time with God and that urgency that you once had to be with your heavenly father has dissipated, but it's been so long, trying to change just seems too difficult.
Or maybe there's a sin in your life, you know that it's not pleasing to God, but you even stop praying about it because you just think now that's part of who you are.
Because if you can see any hints of these things in your life, then the gospel confronts you with a stark question. do you really want Christ's transforming grace?
[19:59] Are you willing to take the sins that you've become so accustomed to and put them to death? Okay, so our deepest sickness isn't physical sickness, it's spiritual, it's sin.

And being healed means letting go of the patterns of sin that we've become so comfortable with.
But here's the wonderful news. You're not alone. you're not expected to do these things by yourself.
In verse seven, the man says, sir, I have no one. But although from his desperate situation, his perspective looked like there was no one to help.
The man could only lie in his mat, but Jesus comes to him. This man wasn't looking for Jesus. He doesn't ask to be healed. When Jesus arrives, the guy doesn't even know who he is, but Jesus chooses him.
Jesus' compassion is personal and it's intentional. And he asks the man to contribute nothing to his healing, nothing at all.

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[21:08] Jesus simply speaks the words and the man is immediately made whole. Like, spiritually, every one of us is this man. God's grace always precedes faith.

We don't climb up to God. We don't have to get near the pool in order to splash water in our faces and make ourselves look clean enough to be presentable to our heavenly father. We can't.
We're spiritually paralyzed, unable to take a single step without God's grace. We're powerless to save ourselves and we're utterly dependent on someone else to save us.
And this is actually good news because the one who can save us will save us. He knows exactly who you are.
He knows exactly what you've done. He knows exactly what you need. All you have to do is believe that he is who he says he is. And this leads us to the most important thing I think that John wants us to see in this passage.
[22:12] So thirdly, finally, can you see the sign? John tells us right at the end of his gospel exactly why he wrote it. He wrote, these things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

These things are written so you'll believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing in these things you'll have life in his name. All the miracles in John's gospel, are all written for that purpose.
And John doesn't call them miracles, he calls them signs. Not simply to show that Jesus is a super healer, although he obviously is, but to convince you that he really is who he claims to be, the Son of God.
Look, we're used to seeing signs at poolside. God. With the account of this man at Bethesda, John's putting up a big sign for us to see, but the sign doesn't say no running, no diving, no heavy petting.
The sign reads, Jesus truly is the Christ, the Son of God. Believe that and you'll have something much greater than physical healing. You'll receive spiritual healing.
[23:33] You'll be made whole and that means you'll be reconciled with God. But there's tragedy, tragedy in the second half of this passage.

The man who's been healed walks out carrying his mat. He's been lying there for 34 years. Let's put ourselves in that position just for a second. Somebody you're vaguely familiar with, you know that he can't walk.
He's been lying there for 38 years, begging, desperate, lonely and alone. And he comes walking towards you and what's the first thing you would say to him?
You'd say, wow, what happened? Who did this? I'm so pleased that you've been healed. This is incredible. But the first people that this man meets don't react like that at all.
He meets the religious authorities of the time and they're not full of joy in any way. In fact, they're outraged. They say, what do you think you're doing?
[24:32] It's the Sabbath day and you're breaking the law. Jesus has just performed miraculous healing and all they can see is a rolled up mat under a guy's arm.

Now, this guy actually, he hasn't broken God's law by carrying his mat. The scribes accused this man of, you know, not resting on the seventh day, the day God appointed for people not to work. This man wasn't working. He'd just been made whole. He was going home. But in the Jewish tradition, they'd invented, they'd created, they'd built around the Sabbath law, certain rules, codes that they had to live by.
I think they were 39. I'm not sure. What they thought constituted breaking the Sabbath day and one of those rules was carrying furniture.
Think about what has to happen for you for that situation to come about. Think about how committed you have to be to your own legal system, your own internal code to live by, the code that you've laid down exactly in your image for you to uphold.
[25:55] that when God performs an unmistakable miracle directly in front of you, you don't even see God. You just see an infringement.

They're looking straight at the sign and they can't read it because they've decided in advance what the sign should say. I think like for all of us, those of us who've grown up in church, who've been in church for a long time, this is frightening us a little bit.
Because just like the healed man's condition is a mirror to our spiritual condition, these first century Jewish rulers, they remind us that there's such an easy tendency to legalism.

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Doctrine is important. The Sabbath day is really important. But there's this permanent temptation, I think, in the heart of Christians, people who take their faith seriously, to be so committed to our own codes, our own sense of how Christians are supposed to behave, how Christians are supposed to look, things that are within our comfort zone, boundaries that we put around God, what is and what isn't acceptable to us, that there's a danger we miss God when he's right in front of us, doing things that only he can do.
The question that these guys should have been asking themselves about this Sabbath controversy is not, is this permissible, but who can do what Jesus has just done?
[27:32] Who can speak a paralyzed man well? On the spot, no rehab, no recovery period, instantly whole. I mean, there's only one possible answer.

only the one who created human bodies, the one who created human bodies in the first place could ever restore a human body like this.
Only the one who holds the whole world in his hands has the kind of authority, the kind of power over broken flesh and blood to take a man whose legs are broken and make him walk.
That's the sign. And the question that John's whole gospel puts to us is in this story, but in other places as well, is can you read it?
Can you read the sign? Will you look in John's gospel at what Jesus does and see who Jesus is? Or will you look like the authorities in this passage and be so preoccupied by your own code, or your own comfort or your own carefully curated conditions, your own right and wrong, that you miss Jesus entirely?
[28:55] So, John hangs up a sign by the pool in Bethesda, but it isn't a list of do's and don'ts like we might see at the local swimming pool. It's a portrait of a person.

Jesus is pointing us to the fact that Jesus truly is what he says he is. Jesus truly is the God-man, the one who's so much greater than a pool of purifying water.
Just one chapter back in John, John chapter four, Jesus meets a woman beside a well and he said to her, if you knew who it was that was speaking to you, you would have asked me and I would have given you living water.
Living water isn't a special drink that Jesus hands out. Like in our passage today, Jesus isn't the one who will carry broken people into a healing pool.
Jesus is living water. There are so many water references in the Bible, but I'm just going to finish with this one. In the last chapter of the last book of the Bible, Paul, in his vision, John sees a river, a river of water of life, bright as crystal flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb, flowing through the middle of the street and on each side of the river is the tree of life and the leaves of that tree are for the healing of the nations.
[30:26] This is the vision of the future for everyone who puts their trust in Jesus. You see, through his victory on the cross, Jesus undoes the brokenness of the world that we see around us.

He restores the beauty and splendor of the Garden of Eden when everything was perfect. And the restored access to the tree of life, that includes the reconciliation of people with God and the intimacy of our relationship with him.
This is what Jesus is bringing when he returns. the first miracle Jesus ever performed was turning water into wine.
At the end of his life, he makes this astonishing statement. He says, I'll not drink wine again until I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom. This is the great hope of every Christian.
This is how we can move forward with joy despite the trials, the suffering, the pain that this life so often hands to people. Maybe tonight you feel like you're a paralyzed man waiting by a pool, helpless and lost.
[31:37] But put your trust in Jesus because this is his invitation. He says, one day, come to me, one day you'll drink festival wine face to face with the water of life.

Let's pray. Lord, our God, help us tonight to see clearly our own need for Jesus. Jesus, who is the water of life, the living water who washes away our sins.
Help us to be people of repentance, confessing our sin, not just with our lips, but turning away from sin, so that the sin that we know is so grievous to you. We thank you, Heavenly Father, for your son Jesus, the living water who doesn't merely improve us, but who makes us altogether whole.
Help us every day to see the reality of who Christ is and what he's done for all sinners and for us as individuals, specific individuals, seeking us out just like he did with this man by the pool.

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Lord, we ask that you'd accept our prayers in Jesus' name. Amen.

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