

The Wholeness Question: Do You Want to Be Made Well?

Series: The Questions of Easter

John 5:1-9

March 6, 2016

Today, we are continuing our series “Questions of Easter.” We are looking through the Gospel of John at the questions Jesus asked people as He was making His way on the road towards Easter and the empty tomb.

Three weeks ago, we tackled the Life question: What Are You Looking For? Some seek power; some seek material blessings; some seek eternal life; some seek to love Jesus.

Two weeks ago, we looked at the Grace question, discovering that each and every one of us need to be born again to enter the Kingdom of God.¹

Last week, we looked at the Change Question, learning that there are a lot of erroneous ideas about religion, and that we have to decide if we want a different life.

Today, we are going to deal with the Wholeness question Jesus asks.

I want to invite you to turn to John 5

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.² For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.³ One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" 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 making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me." Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.⁴

John introduces today's story by telling us that this happened during one of the Jewish festivals. There were three Jewish feasts which required attendance: the Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread (at the same time as our Easter), the Feast of Weeks (also called Pentecost), and the Feast of Tabernacles (which was in late September, early October). Every adult male Jew who lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem was legally bound to attend them.⁵

We don't know which festival this was, but what is more interesting is no where does John mention the disciples or the crowds. Normally, at least the crowds are part of the story, following Jesus, listening to His words, watching the spectacle that was this carpenter from Nazareth. Could it be that this story comes from early in Jesus' ministry, before the crowds and the disciples, or that possibly it was a case when Jesus was able to slip into Jerusalem alone and without being noticed?

¹ John 3:3

² John 5:1-3 (NRSV)

³ John 5:4 (KJV)

⁴ John 5:5-9a (NRSV)

⁵ Barclay's Daily Study Bible, John 5:1

John tells us that Jesus walked through the Sheep Gate. The Sheep Gate was the entrance through which vast flocks of sheep entered Jerusalem to be sacrificed in connection with the temple rituals. Jesus, the Lamb of God, entered the Sheep Gate into Jerusalem.

Near the gate was the pool called Bethesda. It was a spring fed pool that was deep enough to swim in. All kinds of people – blind, lame, paralyzed – were scattered around the pool under the 5 covered porches or alcoves. They would stake out their spot under the porches for protection from the elements, but they also needed to stay close to the pool.

You see, beneath the pool was a subterranean stream which every now and again bubbled up and disturbed the waters. The belief was that the disturbance was caused by an angel, and that the first person to get into the pool after the troubling of the water would be healed from any illness from which they were suffering.⁶

Like many others, a lame man had been waiting. It had been 38 years since he first heard of the miracles at the pool and decided to spend the rest of his life waiting for his chance. Day after day, year after year, he watched the pool, hoping, dreaming, praying. There had been times when the waters were disturbed, but there had always been someone else who had beat him to the pool.

After 38 years, this man's problem had become a way of life. No one had ever helped him into the pool. He had no hope of ever being healed. Warily, he watched the pool, but no angel came, at least not for him; yet, thinking it to be his only chance, he waited still. The man's situation looked hopeless. As a result, he didn't not know that there was One near him whose word could heal him in a moment.

Jesus entered the area around the pool. Picture it: dozen and dozens of people were there, but He picked out one individual, a lame man.

Look at verse 6:

"When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, 'Do you want to be made well?'"⁷

This is today's Question of Easter, "Would you like to get well?" What a strange thing to ask? But it's not as foolish a question as it may sound. The man had waited for 38 years and it might well have been that hope had died and left behind a passive and dull despair.

It is also possible that in his heart of hearts, the man might well have been content to remain an invalid, for, if he was cured, he would have to shoulder all the burden of making a living.

The man had not asked Jesus for help, and a beggar of that day could lose a sometimes profitable (and easy) income if he were cured. Or perhaps he had simply lost the will to be cured.⁸

But this man's response was immediate. He wanted to be healed, though he did not see how he ever could be since he had no one to help him.

Verse 7:

"Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me."⁹

⁶ Barclay's Daily Study Bible, John 5:1

⁷ John 5:6 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁸ NIV Study Bible, John 5:6

The first essential towards receiving the power of Jesus is to have intense desire for it. Jesus said: “Do you really want to be healed? Do you really want to be changed?” If in our inmost hearts, we are well content to stay as we are, there can be no change for us.

We need to want healing from the lameness of resentment, pornography, unfaithfulness, feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth, fear, alcoholism. For some, these things have become comfortable – they’ve lived with them so long that they are used to them, and unwilling to give them up.

Jesus went on to tell the man to get up. It was as if he said to him: “Man, bend your will to it and you and I will do this thing together!”

My friends, the power of God never dispenses with the effort of you or me. Nothing is truer than that we must realize our own helplessness; but in a very real sense, it is true that miracles happen when our will and God’s power cooperate to make them possible.

In effect, Jesus was commanding the man to attempt the impossible. “Jesus said to him, ‘Stand up, take your mat and walk.’”¹⁰

The man might well have said with a kind of injured resentment that for 38 years his bed had been carrying him and there was not much sense in telling him to carry it.

But Jesus told the man to pick up his mat. Does that mean Jesus was a neat freak, like some mother, “Pick up your socks. Put your shoes away. This is a pig sty!”

No. Instead, Jesus told him to pick up his mat to remind him and show the people he walks by the miracle that has occurred in his life.

COMMENT: SOMETIMES, YOU HAVE TO CARRY THE REMINDER OF THE THING THAT HELD YOU BACK.

But no matter how trapped you feel in your infirmities, God can minister to your deepest needs. Don’t let a problem or hardship cause you to lose hope. God may have special work for you to do in spite of your condition, or even because of it. Many have ministered effectively to hurting people because they have triumphed over their own hurts.¹¹

You of course know the story of a little girl walking along the beach who discovers hundreds of starfish washed up onto the shore, dying from the heat of the sun. Here and there, as she skips along, she tosses a starfish back into the surf. They will live while the hundreds remaining on the shore will die. Upon returning home the little girl tells her mother what she has done. “What you did with those few starfish doesn’t make any difference,” replies her mother. “Well it made a difference with the ones I threw back,” retorts the little girl.

John is the Gospel of the Ones:

- Jesus walked 90 miles through the desert to find and win Philip; it made a difference to him.¹²
- Jesus talked with ONE woman at a well; it made a difference to her.
- Jesus healed ONE man by a pool of water. It made a difference to him.¹³

⁹ John 5:7 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹⁰ John 5:8 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹¹ Life Application Bible Notes, John 5:6

¹² John 1:43

¹³ John 5:1-17

Jesus singled you out – as an individual. And it made a difference to you.

The question remains: do you want to be made well? Free from the sin guilt upon your life? Liberated from the prejudice and racism that darkens your soul? Released from the burdens of your past? Delivered to new life, wonderful life in Christ?