

Sunday Sermon

3/16/25

Series: Revealed

Passage: John 5:1-17

Title: God of the Unknown: Healing the Man at the Pool

Good morning church! It's so good to see you all this morning. To those new this morning, I want to welcome you. My name is Pastor Chris. I am the lead pastor here at PCC and whether you are exploring who Jesus is, new to the faith, or a long-time Christian, I am glad you are here. My prayer is that you will encounter the Lord in this place.

Today, we'll be camping out in John 5 if you want to turn there in your bibles. We are currently in the third week of our series, "Revealed." This is a series which will take us all the way through Easter. It's a series about signs. Namely, the 7 signs that John posts along the path of his gospel meant to reveal the truth about Jesus' identity – that he was more than simply a man, more than a prophet, more even than a miracle worker, but that he is in fact God incarnate – sent to bring life and healing to all who would believe.

So far in our series, we've looked at two miracles: Jesus turning water into wine and healing the official's son. Both pretty cool. Both more than we are capable of. But neither sign was an end in itself. Each pointed to and implied something about Christ, his purpose, and his passion. I won't rehash it all this morning, but if you missed those messages, you can find them on our website. And I would encourage you to go back and listen to them yourself.

Today, we are looking at our third sign. So let's begin by reading our passage - John 5:1-17.

{Read and pray}

CS Lewis, in his book *The Great Divorce* tells this story about a bus of dead spirits, ghosts, being taken from hell to the foothills of heaven where they are invited, given a chance, to go in. Now, disclaimer, this is a novel, more than that, it is a dream in the book. It's not meant to be theological statement of truth. That wasn't the point he's making. Fair?

So each one of these passengers had a vice represented by something on their shoulder. And at the foothills of heaven, the narrator observes interactions between spirits from Heaven and the ghosts from Hell, with the spirits attempting to guide the ghosts towards a path of joy and light. Many ghosts, however, are unwilling to leave their current state, clinging to their vice, their sin, and refuse the offer of Heaven.

However, this one particular man, who had a lizard on his shoulder which represented his vice – lust. Reluctantly, he allows an angel, through incredible burning and pain, to reach out and grab the lizard on the man's shoulder, to rip it off, and to crush it. Freeing the ghost from his burden to sexual desire. And at that point, to the Narrator's amazement, the lizard transforms into a beautiful stallion, who gallops away with the ghost, now a new-born man, toward the mountains of heaven. Again, not theologically accurate, but the point being

made was, that by surrendering our earthly desires, God can transform those things into something more beautiful, powerful, and good than we ever thought possible. Listen to this quote, **"What is a Lizard compared with a stallion? Lust is a poor, weak, whimpering whispering thing compared with that richness and energy of desire which will arise when lust has been killed" – C.S. Lewis**

In our passage this morning, we see Jesus' ability to powerfully transform a person's reality. We find Jesus back in Jerusalem at a place called Bethesda. Picking it up in verse 2, it says, **"Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool...which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids-blind, lame, paralyzed."** – John 5:2-3

Ok so we have this pool, and around this pool it was the habit of many who were in need of healing to gather, hoping for a healing miracle. Why did they do that? Because there was a belief, a superstition, among the people of that day that when the water was troubled, or stirred up, that this was caused by an angel who visited the pool, and the first person who got into the pool when it was stirred up would be healed.

Now my purpose today isn't to debate the validity of those reported healings, the point is that the pool at Bethesda had established a reputation as a place where people could find healing. And at this place, the text tells us a really sad reality, **"One man was there, who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years."** – John 5:5

Now it doesn't say he'd been lying there at the pool for 38 years. It says he had been an invalid for 38 years. We don't know why. We don't know his backstory. But whatever he has, has made him unable to walk for 38 years. That's a long time. Not being able to walk was his reality. Want perspective? 1987. 38 years ago. And somewhere along the line, someone had brought him, weak and helpless, to the pool and left him there. This is where Jesus finds him.

Now, put yourself in that place for a moment. In this place was a great crowd of people -- paralyzed, blind, lame, sick -- all waiting for the water to be troubled. All hoping for a miracle healing. All equal in their need on some level. And out of that crowd Jesus picked one guy. He did not empty the colonnades. He didn't heal everybody. He did not invite them all to come down so that he might lay hands on them; nothing of that sort. He went to only one man.

Think of the significance of that. Was Jesus not able to heal everyone? I don't think that was it. Did someone pay for Jesus to go get this one guy? No. Remember this is a sign. It's pointing us toward something. Surrounding the one man that Jesus helped, were many people the Lord didn't help. The value of a story like this is, not only to reveal to us who Jesus was, but also to reveal to us a little bit about who we are.

In a sense, this story is a microcosm, or a picture, of the human condition. Before God, we are all, in a sense, helpless, weak, crippled and lame. Looking for anything that might bring

us hope, life, or healing. I mentioned last week with the royal official – no one escapes our need for Jesus. We all need him. We all need help. And the question for us this morning becomes – Do we want *Jesus* to help us?

Look at this question. Verse 6: ***“When Jesus saw him and knew he had been lying there a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be healed?’” - John 5:6***

Now, reading that, we might think to ourselves, “What a strange question to ask a man who has been sick for 38 years! “Do you want to be healed?” Of course he would!” But Jesus doesn’t ask stupid questions. It harkens back to the question Jesus asked his first disciples when they started following him, ***“What are you seeking?”*** – John 1:38. Jesus isn’t asking the question for himself. He is asking because it is important for this man to answer (at least to himself, in his heart of hearts) the question, “Do I want to be healed?”

Because here’s the thing, I know many people today who do not want to be healed – especially by Jesus. We do not want to receive divine help in our problems. We do not want to be helped out of our weakness, our helplessness. Because it’s familiar. We know it. We use it. It fuels something in our lives. Time and again, I have seen people turn their backs on a way of deliverance and choose something else because they did not want to be healed.

God says, in Deut. 30:19, ***“Today, I set before you life and death, choose life.”*** He’s not going to force himself in. We all know that you cannot help somebody who does not want to be helped. The sad reality is that, for many of us, our truth is that we are not helpless enough yet. We are not ready to give up on flesh, our striving, our human efforts to solve our problems. We are not ready to admit our need for something more than ourselves. We are still determined to run to the water instead of to Jesus when we need healing.

You know it’s interesting. I found out this week that in the excavation of this site, archeologists have found idols laying around the pool of Bethesda. False gods. False answers. False promises not based in any real power other than the strength of the human will. And if that’s what we are running to and lacing our faith in, Jesus can do nothing for us.

So question: “Do you want to be healed?” You, for yourself, have to answer that question. But now look at the man’s response. Remember, Jesus is teaching. Jesus is revealing who he is. We look back with 20/20 vision. This man does want to be healed, but he doesn’t have a box yet for Jesus. He doesn’t understand the more and better God wants to give him, or that Jesus himself will be the source of his healing.

Verse 7, ***“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.’” - John 5:7***

He says, “I’ve tried. I’ve done everything I know how. I want to be healed, but I lack the ability; I’ve no one to help me. I’ve given up. I have no hope.”

Beloved, is that you this morning? You’ve tried. You’re tired of trying. You’ve have given up on your situation. You really don’t believe there is any hope for real or lasting change.

I know there are some like that among us. Resigned to a spirit of hopelessness. I don't know what your struggle has been. Maybe you have tried to stop drinking. You know that alcohol is ruining your life, your family, your home. But you can't. Maybe it's pain medication, or drugs. You're hooked. Maybe it's a destructive habit you just can't stop. Maybe you have given up wrestling with the inner problem of lust, you just can't overcome your porn addiction.

It's amazing to me how many people casually feel they are in control of something that really has control of them. You have heard of the person who said, "It's easy to stop smoking. I've done it hundreds of times!" The truth is, we are more like this man than we want to believe.

And that reality, now brings us to our sign. And this sign is two-fold: we have the what and we have the when.

First the what. Jesus did a miracle. But notice what Jesus said to the man who had lost all hope, a man who had resigned himself to live in his bondage? Did he say, "Come on! Just try harder. You can make it?" Did he say, "What you need is support. I'll help you get into the pool next time?" Did he say, "Buck up! Some day it will all work out?" No. Listen, church. These are the suggestions of men.

What does Jesus say, then?

"Get up, take up your bed, and walk." - John 5:8

Ok. Put yourself in the man's shoes. Not walking had been this man's reality for 38 years. It was his identity. It was his tool, and it was his vice. Do you want to be healed? Yes, but I know this life. Healing would call him into the unknown. If I lose what I have, who would I be? What would I do? Would life be better/worse? At least this is the devil I know. What Jesus says to him is a critical clue that we often miss when we are looking for help from God. There is always something God tells us to believe, to do, and act on.

When Jesus says, "Get up," he is challenging the man to believe something – that Jesus, not the idolatry around him, is the source of his healing. That in Christ alone is where the power for restoration, freedom, and overcoming is going to be found. ***"In him was life, and that life was the light of men."***

The man looking at Jesus, needed to decide if he was going to believe what Jesus was saying to him. You see, God makes some incredible promises throughout scripture. And as we read them, we need to wrestle with that reality – do I believe this?

Do I believe that, in Christ, I CAN "Get up?" not because of me but because of his power in, around, and over my life?

See, what Jesus says to do, this man could not do. The call is for this man's faith to be transferred from his own efforts to Jesus: "He must do it. I cannot."

BUT then here's the second part, but then I've got to live it.

The man must also have reasoned somewhat along these lines, "Ok, if this man is going to help me then I have got to decide to do what he tells me to do."

"Get up. Take up your mat. Walk." Words of action. Jesus does not say, "Try to build up faith in your mind." He says, "Believe and act." **Forget what is behind, press on toward what is ahead.** That phrase "take up your bed," is a command to leave the old life behind. "To make no provision for a relapse."

I was once talking to a student of mine who was struggling with drug addiction. We were meeting out by the canal in Pittsford. And he had this incredible testimony of how God encountered him, and set him free, and he was turning over a new leaf in his life and excited to do that. And I believe all that was genuine on his part. But then he told me, "and I keep a pill in my wallet as a reminder." I said to him, "No you don't. You keep it as a backup plan. A security blanket. As an option, just in case one day you might need it again." The man might have said to himself, "I'm healed, but I had better leave my bed here; I may need it tomorrow."

And here's the truth, if he had said that he would have been back in it. Maybe not the next day, but he would have returned. Prov. 26:11 – **"As a dog returns to his vomit, so a fool returns to his folly."** Jesus said, "Get rid of that mat, flush that pill; don't leave it there."

Do you want to be healed? Make no provision to go back to the old. Burn the bridge. Cut it off. Many a person has really been touched by God, delivered from some inner attitude, a bitter spirit or whatever, but then he has allowed the past to come back in again and he finds himself right back where he was. The Lord knows what he is talking about -- "take up your bed." You ain't comin back.

Then the third thing: "walk." Do not expect to be carried. It's not about the people around you. They can't carry you forever. But if Jesus gives you the power to rise, Jesus is also the One who can give you the power to walk every day. It's about your relationship with him. Keep your eyes on him. **"Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith,"** - Hebrews 12:2.

That's the what. Now for the when. It's at this point that John transitions to the immediate reaction of others to this miracle.

5:9 – "Now that day was the sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who was cured, "It is the sabbath, it is not lawful for you to carry your bed." But he answered them, "The man who healed me said to me, 'Take up your bed, and walk.'" - John 5:9b-11

Now if you saw a healing like this, you would think that their reaction would be, "What?! Somebody healed you!? We need to know who this guy is!" But instead, their focus was on the rule, "Who is the guy who told you to disobey one of our regulations?" Their focus was off. And because of that, they completely missed what the sign was revealing: Jesus - the Lord of the Sabbath. That the God of Mercy and Compassion was at work. More than that, that he never rests in his pursuit of us, in his desire to bring his healing, restoration, forgiveness into our lives, to reveal to us who he is, and to make us whole.

If you read the rest of the passage, Jesus again meets the man and calls his attention to the fact that not only had he been physically healed, he had been spiritually healed as well. His sins had been forgiven; he had been washed, he had been cleansed; he was a new man.

Would you put your faith in Jesus this morning?

And to that person who has received the gift of wholeness from God, without any merit or earning on his part, to that person, Jesus says, "Sin no more."

Listen: Sin is at the root of all the brokenness and bondage of this world. Jesus warns, "Don't go back to it. **He whom the Son sets free is free indeed.** There's nothing good back there."

Beloved, God is concerned about areas of sin in our lives. He wants to cut them out.

Paul says, "**Don't be deceived; God is not mocked. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life**" - Galatians 6:8.

What is a lizard compared to a stallion? "**Do you want to be healed?" "Then get up, take up your bed, and walk."**

[pray]

The front is open to come seek the Lord for our healing. If God has placed something on your heart this morning, I invite you to come. Let's stand and pour out our praise to him.

Revealed

THE SIGNS OF JESUS

"What is a lizard compared with a stallion? Lust is a poor, weak, whimpering, whispering thing compared with that richness and energy of desire which will arise when lust has been killed."

- C.S. Lewis, The Great Divorce

“Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool...which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids-blind, lame, paralyzed.”

– John 5:2-3

“One man was there, who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.”

– John 5:5

“When Jesus saw him and knew he had been lying there a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be healed?’”

– John 5:6

“Today, I set before you life and death, choose life.”

– Deut. 30:19

“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.’

– John 5:7

“Jesus said to him, ‘Get up, take up your bed, and walk.’”

– John 5:8

“In him was life, and that life was the light of men.”

– John 1:4

“Jesus said to him, ‘Get up, take up your bed, and walk.’”

– John 5:8

“As a dog returns to his vomit, so a fool returns to his folly.”

– Prov. 26:11

"Looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..."

– Heb. 12:2a

“Now that day was the sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who was cured, “It is the sabbath, it is not lawful for you to carry your bed.”

But he answered them, "The man who healed me said to me, 'Take up your bed, and walk.'"

– John 5:9b-11

“The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.”

– John 5:15

"Don't be deceived; God is not mocked. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."

– Gal. 6:8