

John 5:1-18
(Isaiah 40:27-31; Romans 8:31-39)
“Do You Want to Be Healed?”

Introduction

Two quick observations before we examine this text: First, this story may sound anti-Semitic to our ears. However, we must remember that the author, John, is himself Jewish, as are Jesus and all of the other disciples. Why, then, does John refer to a particular group as “the Jews”? It is because the disciples were mostly from the Galilean region in the north, and found themselves in an escalating conflict with the religious leaders centered down south in Jerusalem. Whenever the gospels speak critically of “the Jews” we should understand the term to mean “the Jewish religious leaders,” rather as though one of you, aggravated with our church leadership, spoke with exasperation of “those Presbyterians.” But this is an “in-house” disagreement, a family dispute where all the players are Jewish. There is no excuse here for anti-Semitism. As my old friend, Steve Brown, has said, “Anti-Semitism is, for a Christian, self-hatred.”

Even as we study this man’s healing and absorb its lessons, we will note this key group of people rejecting Jesus. It is easy for us to be critical of them, to miss the crucial lesson they teach us. But these religious leaders whom John calls “the Jews” were very much like us: Like us, they believed the Scriptures, and so they revered God and hated blasphemy, they loved God’s law and hated Sabbath-breaking. Next week, I hope to look more closely at them, and at Jesus’ response to them. But we will fail to understand these stories if we do not realize that Jesus’ religious opponents were very much like conservative, evangelical Christians in their beliefs and their ethos.

Second, this particular story was a major reason – prior to the 1964 Israeli war – for many scholars believing that John’s gospel could not have been written by an original disciple of Jesus. The pool described in our text had five colonnades or porticos, so scholars assumed that the pool must have been in the shape of a pentagon. Since the ancient Jews never built pools or anything else in that shape, it was assumed that the author must have been writing long after the destruction of Jerusalem, describing a pool that would never have been found in Jerusalem. However, after the Israeli army captured Jerusalem in 1964, and archeologists began to excavate the city, a pool was discovered just inside the Sheep Gate, as described in our text, a pool with five colonnades, not in the shape of a pentagon, but rather a typical Jewish rectangular pool with four colonnades surrounding it and a fifth colonnade across the middle of the pool, dividing it in two. In the light of that discovery, scholars revised their view of John’s authorship and argued that the writer must have been an eyewitness, a contemporary of Jesus, someone familiar with Jerusalem prior to its destruction in 70 AD, who had known this pool before it was lost to memory.

Turn now to the story itself and picture the scene: We see depicted here, lying sick and helpless under the colonnades, humanity in all its brokenness, what John describes as “a multitude of invalids – blind, lame, and paralyzed” (5:3). We even use these physical

terms to describe our inner brokenness: “He’s so blind.” “She’s so lame.” “I was paralyzed with fear.” And when we become focused on our brokenness it is easy to wonder whether there is a God at all or, if there is a God, to wonder whether he really loves broken people like you and me. Into this scene walks the Messiah, God’s anointed, the Savior of the world. God has not abandoned his people. He has not turned his attention only to the whole, the healthy, the successful, the good upstanding folk. No, he has come to seek and save the lost and broken, for we are all in fact lost and broken apart from his grace.

If we only had the story we studied last week, the story of a man who in his brokenness sought out Jesus and believed that Jesus could help him, and who persisted in the face of what seemed at first to be rejection, then we might think that salvation was only for those who are strong and persevering by nature. Thank God for this story of a man who is weak and pathetic, tired of fighting, disillusioned and expecting nothing from God or man. To such, God comes in grace with the power to heal and make whole. Note five aspects of this encounter.

Body

- 1. Jesus asks the man a crucial diagnostic question, one his Spirit may be asking you this morning: “Do you want to be healed?” (4:6).**
- 2. The man gives a defeated, depressing, faithless answer: “Sir, I have no one to help me” (4:7).**
- 3. Jesus calls this faithless man to a bold act of faith: “Get up, take up your bed, and walk” (4:8).**
- 4. The man responds in faith *because* Jesus has already healed him. This is easy to overlook – he responds to what Jesus has *already* done for him: “And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked” (4:9).**
- 5. Jesus calls him to the obedience of faith and warns him of the consequences of disobedience: “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you” (4:14).**

Conclusion

What of you? Where have you allowed the brokenness of life to define you, to rob you of your hope and courage? Are you waiting for some one to come along and make things right? Has not Jesus promised forgiveness to those who ask, salvation to those who call upon his name, new life and the power of his Spirit to those who ask and seek and knock? Do you want to be healed? Do you want to be forgiven? Do you want new life? Then stop lying around waiting for someone to come find you. Christ has come and is calling. Get up! Believe! Follow! Your life is on the line. Get up and walk!