

GET UP! PICK UP YOUR MAT AND WALK

John 5:1-18

Key Verse: 5:8

“Then Jesus said to him, ‘Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.’”

In chapters 1-4 we have learned who Jesus is. Jesus is the Creator God. Jesus is the Eternal God. Jesus is the Word of God. Jesus is the promised Messiah. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is the Savior of the world. Whoever believes in Jesus receives eternal life and the kingdom of God as his inheritance. In the last passage we learned how faith grows. Faith grows when we accept Jesus’ word as the very word of God and obey it, denying our own ideas.

How nice it would be if everyone believed in Jesus and was blessed with eternal life in the kingdom of God. However, not everyone believes in Jesus. In fact, many people whom Jesus met did not accept his word or believe in him as Messiah. In chapter 5, John begins to deal with the unbelief of the Jewish leaders. It is a theme that runs through to chapter 12, where John quotes Isaiah, “Lord, who has believed our message?” In their sin of unbelief, the Jewish leaders finally crucified Jesus. Their unbelief was a wicked influence to their own times and to future generations. We must know that unbelief is a sin against God and a poisonous influence on others. Even though many people were unbelieving, some accepted Jesus as the Son of God and the Savior of the world. These persons could experience the tender love of Jesus and the power of his saving grace. Those who believe in Jesus are saved to the uttermost. Those who don’t believe are condemned (3:18).

In today’s passage Jesus heals a man who had been an invalid for 38 years. Though he was healed physically, he was not healed from his unbelief. So he became a wretched man and an enemy of God. God made man to live by faith in God. Faith is essential to receive eternal life, and even to be a normal human being. May God help us to hear Jesus’ word and have faith in the Son of God.

First, at the pool of Bethesda (1-4).

Look at verses 1-2. “Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. 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. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.” What a scene it was. There were nothing but disabled people lying around the pool. It was not a swimming pool, but a healing pool. They believed that when the water was stirred, the first one into the pool would be healed of whatever disease he had. This soothed their minds. But in fact, their chances of being healed were about equal to winning the Illinois State Lottery. Most of the time, each one groaned over his own disability. Each one thought his situation was the worst. They filled the air with complaints, groans, and laments. They were barely surviving day to day by the help of others. They were a burden to society and they were miserable people.

Still, they were human beings. They were social creatures, and they must have developed their own kind of society, like those in a POW camp do. They must have compared themselves with each other in many ways and had their own social order and status symbols. Some might have had a little better mat which could automatically unfold and inflate. Their comfortable mats made them the envy of all the people at the pool. They also struggled with their “human dilemma.” They understood each other’s agonies and sympathized with each other. Perhaps the blind man shared his longing to see his mother’s face, and the lame man cried uncontrollably. Then the paralyzed man remembered his glorious touchdown run in high school, and wailed at his present reality. The blind man understood. So they must have tried to cooperate with each other. But at the root, each one was selfish. When the opportunity came to get into the pool to be healed, no one could yield to the other. In their desperate struggle to be healed, they fought with each other, exploiting each others weaknesses. In a sense, this is a microcosm of human society. All human beings have fatalistic elements and tragic sufferings in their lives. They are wounded and sensitive as they live together. They sympathize with each other. But they are selfish and limited.

Second, the marvelous grace of Jesus (5-6).

Look at verse 5. “One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.” This man seems to have been the senior citizen of the disabled society. He had been an invalid for 38 years. What a long time it was! Thirty-eight years ago, it was 1966. The Vietnam War was beginning to escalate. The Beatles performed in American cities. Richard Nixon defeated Hubert Humphrey in the presidential election. Since then, we have gone through the hippie movement, the yuppie movement, Generation X and Generation Y. The world has changed and most people have gone through the seasons of life. During the 38 years he was paralyzed, this man’s childhood friends had graduated from college, married happily, had children, and attained honor and success in the world. They had become rich and enjoyed a good and full life with all the human blessings. Yet this man had remained a paralytic, his life condition unchanging, and the seasons passing him by year after year for 38 years. He seemed to be the most pathetic person at the pool.

Look at verse 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?’” Among all the tragic people at the pool, Jesus’ eyes fell on this man. Jesus was concerned about this man. Jesus chose this man as the one he would get to know better. Jesus chose this man as the one he would heal. This man was vaguely hoping to be first into the water when it was stirred, but something much greater and more wonderful happened to him. Jesus chose him to receive his grace. He was totally undeserving, but Jesus visited him to help him out. Jesus’ grace shone upon him like sunlight from above. Praise Jesus!

Third, Jesus asked, “Do you want to get well?” (6)

Jesus’ choice of the paralytic man was deliberate and meaningful. Jesus came to the most disabled of the disabled, to the poorest of the poor. Jesus came to heal the worst case, and thus reveal his compassion and power as God to all people. It was because Jesus wanted to plant hope in all men by helping one man. Jesus asked him, “Do you want to get well?” This question had deep meaning. First of all, Jesus wanted to make a personal relationship with him. Jesus did not heal him from afar; Jesus got personally involved. Jesus spoke to the man to make friends with him. Jesus asked him whether he had a desire to get well. That was a good question. Year after year, this man had come to the pool without being healed until 38 years had passed. In the beginning he might have had a great expectation to be healed. For several years he might have done his best to keep up his desire to be healed. Perhaps he studied stories of persistent paralytics who persevered until they were healed. This boosted his morale for a while. But after 38 years, his attitude was different. He no longer dreamed about the joyful new life he would live after being healed. He was resigned to his misery. Jesus asked him, “Do you want to get well?” Jesus wanted to ignite a burning desire to be healed as the first step to help this man.

We must hear Jesus’ question, “Do you want to get well?” Just as this man had a paralysis problem, many people have real problems that rob them of happiness. After struggling for a while with the problem, many have given up and resigned themselves to live as a failure, nursing their misery as best they can. One person has a problem of being overweight. This person struggled for a while but gave up. Now this person tries to “live with it” even though it is debilitating to that person’s happiness. Another person has experienced failure in school study. For a while this person tried hard to do homework regularly. But when it was hard, this person lost strength and gave up. Jesus asks, “Do you want to get well?” Jesus has hope to heal us even when we have given up on ourselves. May God help us accept Jesus’ hope and have a holy desire to be healed in our hearts.

Fourth, Jesus said, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk” (7-8).

How did the man respond to Jesus’ question? Look at verse 7. “Sir, 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.” This man did not acknowledge that he had a desire problem. In fact, he did not acknowledge that he had a problem at all. Instead, he talked about others who did not help him. He blamed the selfishness of society for his failure to obtain healing. He also had a defeated spirit. It seems that he had tried several times to get into the pool first. But the competition was really tough. The blind guys were strong and very pushy. Before he could make it into the pool, someone else got in ahead of him. He experienced failure again and again. Each failure deflated his spirit further. He felt very keenly the bitterness that accompanies failure. By the way, we must know that failure is really painful and bitter. Many adopt a mentality of mediocrity and avoid the struggle to be successful, thinking it does not matter. After failure, they shrug their shoulders saying, “Oh well.” But one day, they wake up and confront the fact that their lives have been a

failure. It hits harder than a direct punch from a heavyweight boxing champion. In our race of life, we must not be defeated. We must win the victory. To win the victory we must never allow a defeated spirit to remain in us. In this man's case, he was thoroughly imbued with a defeated spirit. How did Jesus help him?

Look at verse 8. "Then Jesus said to him, 'Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.'" Jesus' word was God's command to him. Jesus' word was spoken with the absolute authority of the Creator who made the heavens and the earth. It was not a suggestion. Jesus' word was a command of the Almighty God. Jesus was not talking to the paralysis, but to the man. Jesus said, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." Jesus forcefully helped him to make a decision. Jesus' word affected his will. Jesus' word overpowered this man and gave his decrepit will the power to get up. It was as though this man borrowed Jesus' will for a while. Philippians 2:13 says, "...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Jesus can restore our weak wills and make us strong in our decisions and desires to do good. Jesus says to us, "Get up!" to restore our willpower by the power of his word.

Jesus also told him to pick up his mat. He must not live as a burdensome paralytic any longer. From now on he must live a new life as a responsible man and a blessing to others. He must get a proper job to support himself and his family, give generously to the work of God and pay his taxes. Finally, Jesus told him to walk. He must live for the glory of God. He must display the work of Jesus in his life. By walking around, he could show what Jesus had done for him and lead others to praise Jesus. Jesus words, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk" were the words of God that could completely heal this man. When this man heard Jesus' words, the paralysis was driven out from his body. At once, he was cured. His atrophied muscles were suddenly strong and healthy. His bones become like steel. His legs were fully restored to carry him and he got up and walked, carrying his mat.

Jesus has the power to heal any kind of incurable disease. The disease is not the problem to Jesus. Jesus can heal the disease, whatever it is. Jesus' word has healing power. Jesus healed this man by his one-sided grace. The man did not deserve it or ask for it. Jesus healed him by one-sided grace alone. Among us, there are so many who have experienced Jesus' healing power. As we know, in America, the broken family problem is really serious. It can disable tender children for their entire lives. But Jesus has the power to heal the broken hearts of American children. For example, there is a wonderful man named Tim Fitch. His parents divorced when he was just a boy and his heart was broken. He tried to forget about his sorrow in many ways, but he could not. He was in danger of becoming a hedonist. Then God, in his one-sided grace, led him to Jesus through one-to-one Bible study. Gradually, the sorrow that had paralyzed his heart was healed. Now he is strong. He has a proper job, a beautiful family and leads one growing fellowship of God's sheep. Jesus has power to heal the broken-hearted and make them great men.

Fifth, Jesus said, "Stop sinning" (9b-15).

What a wonderful healing Jesus performed. But suddenly, into this gracious picture come the religious leaders of Jerusalem. They ignored the marvelous healing work of Jesus and criticized the man for carrying his mat on the Sabbath, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." They wore the garments of religious leaders, but their hearts were full of unbelief. They did not recognize the work of God. Rather, they became critical and very negative. They were very scary to the newly healed man. He was intimidated by them. Then he returned to his old habit of avoiding personal responsibility and blaming others. This time he blamed Jesus for giving him bad advice to carry his mat on the Sabbath. The religious leaders wanted to carry out a criminal investigation. However, they could not discover who healed the man. It was because the man had no idea who it was. How could he not know who Jesus was? It was because his soul was paralyzed by the power of sin. He was healed physically, but not spiritually.

Sin paralyzes man's soul. Sin makes man too lazy to carry out his mission. Sin takes away the holy desires from man's heart and fills him with dirty and petty desires. Sin makes man proud and unthankful. It is sin that paralyzes man's soul. Romans 1:21 says, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." A spiritually healthy person will glorify God as God. A spiritually healthy person will give thanks to God. This is the way God made us to be. But when sin paralyzes a person's soul, he neither glorifies God nor gives thanks to him. This man's ingratitude was a symptom of sin. Those who are proud and unthankful are all very sick with sin.

Look at verse 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.’” It is amazing that Jesus found this man. Jesus helped him with one-sided grace and a broken shepherd heart to the end. Jesus really wanted him to acknowledge that he had been healed. Jesus wanted him to be thankful and live a happy life. But Jesus also warned him that his pride and ingratitude were sin. If he did not repent, he would end up in a worse condition than being a lifetime paralytic; he would go to hell. This is why Jesus fought such a fierce spiritual battle to save this man’s soul. Did the man take Jesus’ warning? No. Look at verse 15. “The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.” Here we see that this man’s main problem is his attitude toward Jesus’ word. Although he had just been healed by the almighty power of God through Jesus word, he did not trust Jesus and take Jesus at his word.

Sixth, “My Father is working and I am working” (16-18).

Look at verse 16. “So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him.” Jesus poured out his life to heal one useless man and to save his soul. But as a result, Jesus became an object of severe persecution by the Jews. Was Jesus discouraged? Not at all. Look at verse 17. “Jesus said to them, ‘My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.’” Jesus kept his eyes on God. Jesus called God “My Father.” Jesus had the assurance of God’s love in his heart. God loved Jesus and Jesus loved God. Jesus had done what pleased God. To Jesus, that was everything. Jesus was ready to go through any kind of persecution for the glory of God. Jesus also taught the religious leaders that God never stops working. The Sabbath is not merely the cessation of labor. It is coming to God and enjoying the love of God and being one with God. Jesus knew what God really wanted to do. God wanted to save all men from their sins, missing no one. God wanted to transform the miserable scene at the pool of Bethesda into the glorious kingdom of God by healing one man and planting hope in all men. Jesus had done what God really wanted him to do.

Jesus taught the love relationship to God and the true meaning of the Sabbath to the religious leaders. They were mean and they were persecuting Jesus. But Jesus sincerely taught them the spiritual truth about God. Jesus wanted them to repent of their unbelief and open their eyes to see God. However, when the Jews heard his words, they began to seethe with anger and hatred. They tried all the harder to kill him, regarding his words as blasphemy.

In this passage we learn that Jesus is full of grace. It is only by his one-sided grace that Jesus comes to us through his words. Jesus heals us in many ways. What Jesus really wants is to heal our souls from the paralysis of sin. Jesus’ word can recreate our inner person and restore God’s strength to our souls. We must put our hope in Jesus and have a sincere desire to be healed. We must accept Jesus’ command, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” We must learn to glorify God and thank God always for the wonderful grace of Jesus.