

JOHN 5:2-9

[INTRODUCTION]

- We're starting the ministry year with a series called *Possible: When God Has More*.
 - And we're focusing on this question:
What are you asking God to do in your life this year?
 - We don't need to settle for the same old struggles, sins, and sighs.
 - This year our lives can be different—and better.
 - Not because we finally get it together, but because God shows up and does what we can't.
 - We are a people of hope, anticipation, expectation—because there is a God in heaven, he truly loves us, and he is at work in our lives.
- So, how would you answer our question?
What are you asking God to do in your life this year?
 - In your faith, your character, your relationships, your circumstances?
 - This could be the year things that have seemed impossible begin to change.

[Transition]

- Today we meet a man who found it hard to believe his life could change.
- But we'll also meet Jesus, who asks an unexpected question that sparks new hope.
- Let's see the difference this true story can make in our lives by enjoying our way through it verse-by-verse.

[CONTEXT]

² NOW THERE IS IN JERUSALEM BY THE SHEEP GATE A POOL, IN ARAMAIC CALLED BETHESDA, WHICH HAS FIVE ROOFED COLONNADES.

- We're in Bethesda—not Maryland, but Jerusalem.
 - And we're by the **Sheep Gate**—a small gate in the city wall near the Temple.
 - Beside us, there's a **pool**—sheep were washed here before being led through the Sheep Gate to be sacrificed in the Temple.
- These details might sound incidental, but this pool has become surprisingly important in the history of our faith. WHY?¹
 - Back in the 18th and 19th centuries, a movement of scholars tried to prove the Bible couldn't be trusted as history but should be viewed as a collection of legends and myths—and they used this exact passage to make their case:
 - At the time, there was no record of a **pool** ever existing at Bethesda.
 - And this passage describes **five colonnades**—covered walkways surrounding the pool. But, they argued, no pool in Jesus's day had five.
 - Their conclusion: whoever wrote this didn't know what Jerusalem was actually like—this isn't history, it's fiction.

- But guess what happened next?²
 - In 1888, archaeologists discovered a pool at Bethesda.
 - And get this:
 - Four colonnades ran around the outside edges.
 - And a fifth ran across a ridge in the middle.
 - Archaeological proof: there was a **pool**—and it did have **five colonnades**.
- Why does this matter?

Because in Christianity, history isn't incidental—it's essential.

 - In other religions it matters less.
 - At bottom, they lay out a blueprint—a series of steps or practices that you must follow to be saved.
 - So for Confucius, Buddha, Muhammad—what matters most isn't the historical details of their lives, but 1) the blueprint they left, and 2) your ability to follow it.
 - But Christianity doesn't work that way:
 - The gospel isn't a blueprint to follow.
 - First and foremost, the gospel is—**good news**.³
 - We're not saved by our good works—but by his.
 - Not by the details of our lives—but by the details of his.
 - The historical details of the Bible matter because our hope is that they happened—and that they happened for us!
 - If they didn't, we're still in our sins.
 - But there was a pool, there were five colonnades, Jesus did enter history—and we can trust this gospel.

[Transition]: We're not even out of **v.2** yet... **v.3**:

³ IN THESE [COLONNADES] LAY A MULTITUDE OF INVALIDS—BLIND, LAME, AND PARALYZED.

- As we arrive at the pool, we join a disheveled **mass** of humanity—gathered there because they believe the water has healing properties.
- Now, notice something intriguing: **v.4** is missing from the text:⁴
 - I've included more info on this in the sermon notes you can read online.
 - But here's what we need to know for now.
 - This verse wasn't part of John's original text but appears to have been added later to explain why the water was believed to have healing properties.
 - If you're reading one of our pew Bibles, you'll see that explanation in a footnote: *for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred the water: whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had.*
 - Since these words were added later, they've been carefully removed to protect John's eye-witness account—remember, the details matter!

[Transition]: So, unusually, we move from **v.3** to **v.5**:

⁵ ONE MAN WAS THERE WHO HAD BEEN AN INVALID FOR THIRTY-EIGHT YEARS.

- From a **multitude** to **one man**—this disheveled mass is made up of individual souls.
- And this man is in desperate need.
 - We're told he's an *invalid*—from what happens next, it's clear he's paralyzed.
 - And he's been this way for *38 years*—no welfare, no support, left to beg, left to die, but **v.6**:

^{6a} JESUS SAW HIM LYING THERE AND KNEW THAT HE HAD ALREADY BEEN THERE A LONG TIME...

- The fact that Jesus is there at all is surprising:
 - Respectable people—and especially those concerned about religious purity—would have avoided this area.⁵
 - But not Jesus: He's there. He sees. He knows.
- This is so like him:
 - He's always moving toward those in need.
 - Seeing the one everyone else overlooks.
 - Knowing what their pain has been like.

[Transition]: It's from this posture of love that Jesus asks his unexpected question, **v.6**:

[CONTENT]

^{6b} "DO YOU WANT TO BE HEALED?"

- At first, it seems like a strange question, doesn't it?
 - Jesus, this man is paralyzed.
 - You bet he wants to be healed!
- Of course Jesus knows this—but he also knows that sometimes we get stuck in our struggles; sometimes we even get comfortable with them in order to cope.
 - Your **marriage** has been hard for so long—you've settled for a distant relationship.
 - You've been **anxious** for so long—you've just accepted it's part of life.
 - You've battled **pornography** for so long—you've resigned yourself to managing the secret instead of finding freedom.

***Do you see this in your life—
an area where you've become cynical or tired?***
- Or maybe it's a little different: maybe it's not resignation, maybe it's resistance—an area where you're unwilling to do the work that change would require.
 - I want a deeper walk with God, but I also want to scroll on my phone. *Do I want to be healed?*
 - I want reconciliation with a friend, but I don't want to admit I was wrong. *Do I want to be healed?*
 - I want to serve, but I don't want to sacrifice my time. *Do I want to be healed?*

***Do you see that in your life—
maybe even in the very area you're asking God to change this year?***

- Whatever your situation, hear the hope in Jesus's question.
 - It's not an accusation; it's an invitation.
 - Your present doesn't have to define your future.
 - In him—things can change.

[Transition]: If you find that hard to believe, you're in good company, because the paralyzed man isn't buying it either. This is what settling looks like up close—not defiance, just a quiet resignation dressed up as realism, **v.7**:

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."

- Notice that he doesn't answer the question—instead, he explains why healing is impossible:
 - **First:** **I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up.**
 - This might be the saddest sentence in the story—he is surrounded by people, yet utterly alone.
 - There is no friend to wait beside him, no family member to carry him, no neighbor willing to help him to the water.
 - **Second:** **While I am going another steps down before me.** Even when I try—and believe me, I've tried—it never works.
- Maybe you've said similar things to yourself about why your life can't change...

[Transition]

- But don't miss this: the man who says, "I have no one," is speaking to the Son of God.
- And notice how Jesus responds to his misunderstanding and unbelief—not with judgment, but with grace.
 - **v.6** Jesus asks: Do you want to be healed?
 - **v.7** the man doesn't answer but lists the reasons he can't be healed.
 - **v.8** Jesus ignores his objections and heals him anyway...

8 "GET UP, TAKE UP YOUR BED, AND WALK."

- Jesus heals
 - And don't you LOVE how he does it?
 - He doesn't offer a better strategy for getting to the water.
 - He doesn't carry him down there himself.
 - Instead, he just speaks: Get up. Take up your bed. Walk.
- And the voice of Jesus... it carries the power that enables the man to obey what he has just been commanded to do, **v.9**:

9 AND AT ONCE THE MAN WAS HEALED, AND HE TOOK UP HIS BED AND WALKED.

- Healing wasn't in a place—it was in a person.
- Healing wasn't in the water—it was in the Healer.

[CONSEQUENCE]

- Do you want to be healed? Go to the Healer.
- Do you want your life to be different? Go to Jesus.
- Don't concentrate on all the reasons you think you can't be healed: *There's nothing I can do... I've tried before—it never works...*⁶
- These words might describe your limits, but they don't describe Christ's.
 - He can change your **circumstances**.
 - He can sustain **you** in circumstances you would never choose.
 - In **either** case, your struggles don't get the final word.

[Transition]: How can we be sure?

[THE CLOSE]

- Because Christ's healing word in **v.8**—*Get up*, literally the Greek word *Rise*—doesn't belong to this moment alone.
- A few verses later, Jesus explains the life-giving power of his voice:
 - **v.25**: *An hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will **hear the voice of the Son of God**, and those who hear will live.*
 - And then **v.28**: *An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will **hear his voice and come out**.*
- Do you see the connection?
 - In **v.8**, a paralyzed man hears the voice of Jesus—and rises from his bed.
 - One day, every believer will hear that same voice—and rise up from the dead.
- We have **resurrection hope**—one day full healing will come:
 - The blind will see, the lame will walk, the dead will rise.
 - And God will wipe every tear from our eyes.
- And with that resurrection hope comes **resurrection power** for today:
 - Jesus **really did** enter history. He **really will** raise us on that day. And he **really is** at work in our lives today.
 - If he can raise you then, he can surely help you now.

[CONCLUSION]

- What are you asking him to do this year?
 - In your faith, your character, your relationships, your circumstances?
 - This could be the year things that have seemed impossible begin to change.
- Bring that desire to Jesus—and see what he will do.

RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*
- H. B. Charles, Jr., *God's Unblocked Number*.
- Collin Huber, *Do You Want to Be Healed?*
- Tim Keller, *The Pool*.
- Andreas Köstenberger, *John*.
- Derek Kidner, *The Message of Jeremiah*.
- Logos Bible Software.
- John L. Mackay, *Jeremiah Volume 2 (Chapters 21-52)*.
- Matthew H. Patton, *Jeremiah*.
- Trevin Wax, *Do You Want to Be Healed?*

Endnotes

¹ This section borrows from Tim Keller's sermon, *The Pool*.

² See F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, p.95.

³ Paraphrased from Bruce, p.1.

⁴ Matt Leitzen did research on this verse, summarizing as follows: John 5:3b-4 is conspicuously absent in the body text of our English Bibles (you will find it in a footnote in most translations). The reason for this is that the authenticity of John 5:3b-4 is debated. There appears to be reasonable doubt that the text was original to John's gospel. (See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 179.) The primary arguments for this position are that (1) John 5:3b-4 is not present in the earliest witnesses, and (2) the text contains an abundance of words that are considered non-Johannine (κατὰ καιρὸν, ἐμβαίνω, ἐκδέχομαι, κατέχομαι, κίνησις, ταραχή, δήποτε, and νόσημα—the last four words only appear here in the New Testament). So, if it is granted that John 5:3b-4 is not original to John, then why was it added? The most probable explanation is that the text was inserted in order to assist future readers, likely after the 3rd century. J.H. Bernard comments that Tertullian (160-230 CE) was the first person to interact with this textual insertion (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, 1:228-229). The most popular argument (see Zane Hodges, "The Angel of Bethesda—John 5:4," in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136:25-39) contends that verse 4 was a contextual aid for readers who were unfamiliar with the city of Jerusalem or cultic lore of first century Palestine, in this case it being a healing shrine just outside the city. By adding verse 4, readers would be able to comprehend the statement made by the lame man in verse 7, i.e., understanding the significance for why the water was stirred up. (See also Gordon Franz, "Jesus at the Pool of Bethesda," in *Lexham Geographic Commentary on the Gospels*, appendix.)

⁵ I owe this insight to Köstenberger's commentary on this verse.

⁶ This is a paraphrase of a great line by Trevin Wax in his blog, *Do You Want to Be Healed?*