

Do You Want to Get Well?

John 5:1-16

For 38 years he has laid here. Forgotten. Neglected. Alone. The hope of healing has always been dangled before him in form of a story that said that whenever the waters bubbled, an angel was in fact stirring the waters, and the first person to get in the pool would be healed. Inevitably, though, whenever the springs did bubble it was always the healthiest, strongest, least needy person who made it to the pool first. He was always left to hope for next time.

Perhaps Jesus has just witnessed one of these events. Perhaps Jesus sees the 38 years of frustration and pain etched into his face. Perhaps, as the Son of God, Jesus simply knows. But for whatever reasons, Jesus approaches this man and asks a most curious question, “Do you want to get well?”

“Do you want to get well?” What kind of question is that? You have been diagnosed with a disabling disease. Your strength and abilities slowly slip away. You live with ever increasing pain. Do you want to get well?

The tests show the tumor is malignant. The treatment is a regimen of radiation and chemotherapy. The cure seems worse than the disease? Do you want to get well?

You hold the divorce papers to your second marriage in your trembling hands. Another failed relationship. You wonder whether you will ever be able to love or be loved. “Do you want to get well?”

You’ve attended their services. You’ve read all the passages. You learned all of their dos and their don’ts. You’ve followed all of their rules, and have done what they told you. But still you have not found the spiritual meaning and purpose you were looking for. You’re empty inside. “Do you want to get well?”

It’s been so long since you’ve said “no” to that temptation; you’ve forgotten what its like not to give in. It has become an addiction. You can’t control it. It controls you. A thousand times you’ve promised to stop. A thousand times you lied. It consumes you and you know it is only a matter of time before it does you in. “Do you want to get well?”

You might think the answer to this question is easy. “Yes, yes, YES! I want to get well. It’s easy to say “yes” but we don’t always want to accept the things that being well brings with it. Sadly, when it comes down to the nuts and bolts of it, some do not want to get well. Not really.

Several years ago the church I pastored reached out, and gave of themselves sacrificially and generously to help a girl named Karen, her two children, and her mother. They were

homeless, had no jobs, and no money. They had been thrown out of the hotel where they had been staying along with everything they owned.

We packed their several boxes into a pickup truck, put them in a hotel for a couple of nights. Eventually we moved them into the empty parsonage until they could get back on their feet. We paid for the utilities. Someone provided bedding. Others pitched in with other items. Everyone pitched in to get them groceries. We got clothing for the kids. We were able to find work for both the mom and the grandmother, and the owner of the business agreed to work them alternating shifts, so Karen wouldn't have to find daycare.

They had a fresh start handed to them on a silver platter. Room and board was provided. No bills to pay. Two full-time jobs at nine dollars an hours. At the beginning of all this we in essence asked Karen, "Do you want to get well?" In earnestness she said, "yes, Yes, YES."

Yet the truth was something different. Karen's mom refused to work. Karen went through 5 jobs in two months. She got fired from or walked out on every one. After two and a half months we had to kick them out. They left with exactly what they started with, nothing. Two and a half gift-wrapped months, and not one thing to show for it. The sad truth is they really didn't want to get well. We found out a short time later from a church in a neighboring town that these two had been working churches over like this for at least two years.

So when Jesus asks the question, "Do you want to get well?" Don't make the mistake of thinking the answer is so obvious. We must also remember that the question is being asked on more than one level. It's not just, "Do you want to get well physically?" There is also a social level, a religious level and a spiritual level.

I. Healing from Illness.

"Do you want to get well?" On the first level, we see healing from illness. This is physical healing. More than once I have heard of those that don't want to get well because they love the attention and care they get and having everyone praying for them. Every week they have a sore this, an aching that, or a recurring other. These people seem to operate on the principle, "I would rather be a someone who is sick than a no one who is well." Sometimes they don't want to get well because of the disability benefits, a lifetime of money without having to work for it. Still others prefer illness because it helps them to avoid responsibility – they don't have to go to work, they can skip services or meetings whenever they don't feel like it. They always have a built in excuse. "Do you want to get well?" If they were completely honest, most of these people would

have to say, “No, not really. I don’t want to deal with the responsibilities and expectations of being well.”

On the other end of the spectrum are those who are too proud to even admit they are not well. To get well, you have to first honestly recognize that you are not well. Too many times we’re not willing to make honest assessments of our diet, our exercise, our habits, our lifestyle, and how they are affecting us, how they are keeping us from being all that God wants us to be.

For those of you that have suffered from serious illness, or had to endure a disabling infirmity, it might be hard for you to imagine someone who doesn’t want to get well. You wish Jesus would come to you and say “Do you want to get well?” And from the bottom of your heart you would say, “Yes, Lord, yes.”

We have to remember, though, Jesus didn’t do miracles so everyone would be healthy and happy. Even in our text; out of all the sick and suffering people lying around the pool, Jesus only healed one. And although I believe Jesus really wanted to help the man he did heal, and not just physically, he also had a greater or further purpose than the miracle itself. Jesus used this miracle to create a confrontation with the Pharisees. In this confrontation he exposed the emptiness of their teaching and the fullness of who he was.

16 So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. 17 Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." 18 For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. (John 5:16-18)

In fact, many of the things that happen in our lives, many of the things that God does or doesn’t do in our lives happen for a greater or further purpose. Sometimes being well, isn’t being physically whole, it is being one with God’s purpose. I think for each of us in our own way, Jesus does come to us and says, “Do you want to be well?” And often that means letting God use us beyond ourselves. Perhaps your suffering will allow you to help others who are struggling and suffering themselves. You will be a conduit of God’s grace and love to a needy world. Perhaps your ailment is protecting you from some spiritual arrogance or temptation that would cause you to turn from God.

I want you to listen to a prayer. When it comes to the question, “Do you want to get well?” Pray this prayer. “Lord, if it will be to your glory, heal suddenly. If it will glorify you more, heal gradually; if it will glorify you even more, may your servant remain sick awhile; and

if it will glorify your name still more, take me to Yourself in heaven.” Do you want to get well? Jesus is the Great Physician.

II. Healing from Loneliness.

“Do you want to get well?” It is obvious that the man suffers from more than a physical disability. Listen to his response to Jesus’ question, “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 (John 5:7).” Did you hear what’s in those words? “I have no one.” These are words of a lonely man. He is forgotten, neglected, abandoned. He needs healing from loneliness.

This pool was surrounded by lonely people. The sick and infirm. The elderly. Poor beggars. In some ways, this pool was the first century equivalent of a nursing home. How many today are abandoned in homes or institutions. Often this is a family’s effort to offer the best care possible, and they provide love and comfort. But many are forgotten and lonely.

You don’t have to be alone to be lonely. This man was surrounded by people, but still he had no one. All of the others around him, were only concerned for themselves. They didn’t care whether he was helped or not. Modern life isn’t any different. Our modern culture has been called the, “The Lonely Crowd.” We are so connected, but we are so isolated. There are lonely people where you work. There are lonely people in your school. There are lonely people in your neighborhood. Friends, there are lonely people sitting right here this morning. Jesus is there for lonely people.

For those who have no one, they should have me and you. We need to be there for those who have no one there for them. Sadly, the lonely are amongst us, and we’re too busy and self-concerned to notice. Sometimes, the lonely are us.

There was a family that went out of their way to welcome some newcomers to church. On finding that they had recently moved to town, they asked how they liked their new community. “Terrible,” they said, “None of our neighbors talk to us and no one has welcomed us to the area.” After the service they noticed that the new family was in the car in front of them as they drove home. Their curiosity grew as they followed their car all the way to their own neighborhood. As they pulled into their driveway they saw the new family pull into the driveway next door. Talk about a Maalox moment.

The body of Christ must be a fellowship of love, a fellowship of belonging, of encouragement, of laughter, hope and friends. We must be a fellowship where anyone can feel

“at home.” Do you need healing from loneliness? Do you want to get well? Jesus is a friend to the lonely.

III. Healing from Religion.

“Do you want to get well?” The biggest thing afflicting this man may not have been his disability or loneliness, it may be an oppressive religious system of meticulous rules and laws. He needs healing from religion. You might be thinking, “Wait a minute preacher. What do you mean healing from religion, don’t you believe in religion?” No, I don’t. Manmade religion and religious rules are a cruel tyrant on the human race. I believe in a relationship with Jesus Christ and with his people. There’s a difference.

The Pharisees, the self-appointed guardians of this system are all over this man for carrying his mat. They don’t care that he was sick. They don’t care that he has been made well. They aren’t concerned about whatever other help he may need. They only care about their rules.

The O.T. law says they were not to work on the Sabbath, that they were to use that time to honor God. So the Pharisees had spent hundreds of years deciding just what was or wasn’t work. For instance, it was okay to borrow a jar of wine or a jar of oil so long as you didn’t say, “Lend them to me.” That implied a transaction, and a transaction meant doing business, and business means work. It was also okay to extinguish a lamp because someone was sick. Otherwise, you were not allowed to put out the lamp. You weren’t allowed to put vinegar on a toothache to alleviate the pain, but you could put vinegar in food.

These sorts of rules went on for volumes, and somewhere in that fine print it said you were not allowed to carry a mat. When Jesus told the man, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk,” he knew exactly what he was doing. You would think the Pharisees could find a reason to rejoice when a man lame for 38 years walks again, but they can’t. In their view: it is better to be lame than to break one of their religious rules.

Sometimes the church is susceptible to the trap of the Pharisees. We can be more concerned about our opinions and traditions than we are the hearts and souls of lost and lonely people. In his book, “The Unchurched Next Door” Thom Rainer calculates that there are as many as 34 million people in this country who are inclined to follow Christ, believe the truth of Scripture, and attend a church, but they have been pushed away or turned off by negative experiences with the church.

Many of these negative experiences happen because Christians or churches go beyond the teaching and truth of Scripture in their demands and expectations, or they are following the truth of Scripture in an unloving, hurtful way.

We had a sister church in Virginia that organized protests when a child who had contracted AIDS through a blood transfusion enrolled at a nearby public school. Such behavior is an embarrassment to the name of Christ. After hearing many such stories, Thom Rainer says he could write a book called, "Christians Say the Dumbest Things."

Perhaps some of you sitting here this morning have been hurt in such a way by a Christian or by a church, maybe even our church. If that's true, I am sorry. Please accept my apology. And it is my hope and prayer that you will know the difference between who Jesus is, and who his followers are and what they sometimes do. Don't blame him, for our sin and shortcomings. We are all sinners fallen short of the glory of God. None of us are perfect. Not one of us is any better than you. We need to look to Jesus, just like you do. "Do you need healing from religion? Do you want to get well? Look to Jesus.

IV. Healing from Sin.

"Do you want to get well?" The greatest healing Jesus can give is spiritual healing. He can heal us from our sin. Jesus leaves the healed man with a very important command, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." Jesus' words indicate that it was likely that this man's condition was a consequence to some sin in his life. I don't know what he may have done in his life 38 years before that may have lead to his condition. I don't know what may still be going on in his life, what it was that caused Jesus to seek him out and tell him, "Stop sinning." But Jesus knows. And Jesus knows my heart. And He knows your heart.

This is not to say that all illness or infirmities are due to sin on our parts. In fact, elsewhere in John, Jesus makes it very clear that this is not the case. We live in a sin filled, fallen world, and until Jesus returns there will always be sickness, disease and disaster. These things don't always happen because of some sin in our lives.

However, sin does sometimes directly lead to suffering in our lives. Adultery can break up a home and lead to STDs. Drunkenness can lead to liver disease. Gluttony can lead to clogged arteries, high blood pressure and heart failure. At their core, these things are spiritual problems and require spiritual healing that only Jesus can give.

Too often we only scratch the itch of the suffering, but we never cure the disease of sin. In fact, we live in a day and age where people think they should be able to do whatever they want spiritually, and get away with it. They don't think they should have to suffer the consequences for their actions. We've become experts at trying to erase the short-term consequences of sin, but we never acknowledge the sin. We never deal with the sin itself. We think if we can do away with the consequences, that we don't have a problem.

We have pills, and surgery, the therapists couch, and a thousand rationalizations to help us accept what we did, but none of it deals with the sin. We can blame our parents, we can blame our past experiences, we can blame our DNA, we can blame our culture, we can claim we were born this way, we can blame our environment. We can claim everybody does it, but we still carry around our guilt. We are still covered in shame. We have sinned against a pure and holy God. We have rebelled against our Creator and Savior, and no one and nothing can take that away, except for Him. And that's exactly what He did.

He took every shameful action. He took every regrettable word. He took every abhorrent thought. He took every moment of selfishness, every act of neglect, every explosion of anger, every indulgence of lust, every time we just couldn't help it, every hurtful, hateful thing that just came out of our mouths, all the way down to the deepest, darkest cesspools in our hearts that gave rise to every unplanned, unfiltered, profane word. He took it all with him to the cross. He died for every last bit of it. He carried the weight of it all. It hung with him there. The shame was pounded into his hands. The guilt was thrust into his side. The blame was pounded into his head. The disgrace flowed from the ribbons of flesh on his back and the holes in hands and feet until it pooled on the ground.

For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. (2 Cor 5:21) NLT

Do you want to get well?

Peter replied, "Each of you must turn from your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38) NLT