
John 5:30

As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

This scripture provides the key to Jesus' entire life and ministry – *as He hears!* Jesus did not do anything because of opportunity (being in the right place at the right time). He did not choose to take action because He had the right gifting, skills, or talent. He did nothing out of duty or obligation and He did not succumb to the pressure from others to do what they wanted or though He should do. He did not guess at what He was supposed to do, hoping that He got it right. He also was not controlled by His feelings and He did not submit to their influence in the decisions He made. Rather, He listened to the voice of His Father and did accordingly. The Father set Jesus' agenda and Jesus lived only to do His Father's will. The relationship we see between Jesus and His father is one of perfect submission which, I believe, is the essence of true belief.

Over and over Jesus has asked us to listen and believe. It is how we first enter into a relationship with God. It is how we receive salvation; it is how we sustain an active relationship with God; and it is how we move and minister in the Lord. It is how we experience eternity now and live as new creations. Hearing and believing are the two steady pillars which undergird our *resurrection* life. God desires us to be so intimate with Him and continually seek Him with our entire heart, soul, and mind, such that we are able and willing to listen to His voice and follow.

John 5:1-9

Afterward Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. Inside

the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, "Would you like to get well?"

"I can't, sir," the sick man said, "for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me." Jesus told him, "Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!" Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking!

Jesus left Galilee where He performed His second miracle (the healing of the government official's son) and He returned to Jerusalem for another one of the Jewish celebrations. We find Him at the pool of Bethesda which means "house of grace." I have a little side note for you regarding the veracity of the Bible. For the longest time there was no archaeological evidence for the Pool of Bethesda, so skeptics used this to claim that John's account was written by someone other than the Apostle John; someone who didn't have eyewitness knowledge of Jerusalem. But as always, science eventually catches up with the Bible. Today, there's really no question that archaeologists have uncovered the actual Pool of Bethesda. In 1956, digging at the ancient Biblical site of Bethesda, archaeologists unearthed a rectangular pool with a portico on each side and a fifth one dividing the pool into 2 separate compartments. And it was located just inside the sheep gate—just like John said.

At this pool were multitudes, or literally in the Greek a plethora, of sick people who were blind, lame, and paralyzed. This is not just a normal collection of sick people but these are people whose bodies are irreparably broken; and, absent some

supernatural healing from God, have no hope. This is the reason they were gathered at the “house of grace.” Some ancient manuscripts add the following:

They were waiting for a certain movement of the water, for an angel of the Lord came from time to time and stirred up the water. And the first person to step down into afterward was healed.

Now whether this was a place where people actually got healed or not we don't know for sure; but we do know that they believed it to be so—that is why they were gathered and that is why some of them spent years and years in this place. This man that Jesus talked to had been there for 38-years. That is crazy when you think about it. Something must have happened at some point in time which caused everyone to stick around that long hoping for a miracle. But either way, they were desperate and wanted God to bring healing.

Many of them, however, were probably there out of habit and routine; this had become their life. This happens to all of us. We get our routines and we get used to our lives, no matter how tragic they have been or how dysfunctional they have become, we just settle into our existence and find a way to cope.

I am sure this place also developed into its own community and had morphed into a family in a weird sort of way. People often come and group together based on a common experience. I think of this when I see kids hanging out in all these various subcultures that try so hard to be unique and different. I realize that these subcultures are in large part just a substitute for the family that they either don't have or the intimacy and trust that is absent in their family unit. So in a weird way, these subcultures become family and become a place where a person believes they

are accepted, or at least fit in. It is very likely that this dynamic happened in the porticos of Bethesda. These were people who were not accepted by the general populous and even within their own religion were left isolated and abandoned.

I want you to try and picture the scene as Jesus walks into this area. Probably one of the first things that hits Jesus as He walks through the porticos is the smell; it probably has a very peculiar and stale odor of sickness that was not pleasant. Then He would have seen this multitude, bodies everywhere. He probably had to walk around and step over people to get to where He was going. “Excuse me, I’m sorry, um, let me just get around you for a minute, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to.”

I am sure those who were sick were totally surprised to see someone walk through this area, especially a Rabbi. It is likely that the residents of Jerusalem would not come anywhere close to this place. The reasons, I am sure, were many. In part because of the feelings of guilt that ran through their bodies. I am sure they felt bad for these people but at the same time they were not going to give up anything significant to help anyone. They may toss them some pocket change if they saw them begging in the streets, but to actually go into this place and interact with them, care for them, love on them—unlikely. The leaders especially thought they had more important “religious” matters to take care of, completely missing the scriptures that speak to having a heart of compassion and mercy. Jesus would later bring an indictment against these leaders because of how callous their hearts had become toward those in need.

Matthew 23:23

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and

mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

People also have fear of the unknown and in those days there was little understanding of medical conditions and their causes. I am sure that people were afraid to even come into that place thinking that something might rub off on them. They would rather keep their distance just in case. Better safe than sorry.

And, of course, we cannot skip over the fact that there was a common belief that the reason these people were sick in the first place is because either they or their parents had sinned; and if that was the case, they did not want to be found hanging around such sinners. They thought God had abandoned them to their pitiful fate so who are we to intervene and risk going against the “will” of God.

Finally, in the next couple of verses we will find out that this was not only a Jewish holiday but it was also a Sabbath. According to their religious traditions, if a person came into contact with a sick person, they would become unclean and not be able to participate in the celebratory events. So again, they likely thought it was best to just keep their distance.

It is for these reasons that I believe that when Jesus walked into this place all eyes would have fixated on Him. A Rabbi here, now, why? What is He doing? Then out of the multitudes of sick, blind, lame, and crippled, He singled out this one man and walked right up to him. We don't really know anything about him or his family. We just know that he has been in this place for 38-years seeking a healing. To us that may seem like a life-time, but keep in mind there is a good chance there were those who had been there even longer or who were in a worse condition than this man. My point is that we are not given any reason why this man

was chosen except for the fact that it was the Father's will—that is it. And, apparently, it was not the Father's will for anyone else to be healed. Jesus just purposefully makes His way through the crowds and walks up only to this one man.

Jesus does not even introduce Himself to him; He does not even ask him his name or inquire about his life, or anything. There is absolutely no chit chat; He just gets right down to business. He asks this man if he would like to get well. The man had no idea who he was talking to and what was about to happen. He had no idea that the one talking to Him had formed the world with His own hands. He had no idea that the one talking to Him had already changed water into wine and healed a boy who was deathly sick with a fever. This man had no idea whatsoever!

You see His worldview was completely limited to the pool, the water, and his own inability to even get into the water when it was stirred. He could see nothing outside of this home, this family, this sickness that had been his for at least the last 38-years. He did not even say, "of course I want to be healed." It seems he had so surrendered to what he believed was his fate and his destiny that the thought of healing and being whole was not even real to him anymore. His hope had long been lost and he was just existing. It was as if when Jesus asked if he wanted to be healed he just looked at Him in the eyes and said, "impossible."

John 5:7

"I can't, sir," the sick man said, "for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me."

I have dealt with so many people who are living just like this man—but unlike this man, who is not a believer, I am talking about Christians whose perspective on life has been molded and fixed by their painful experiences. For some it is a fractured and embittered family life, abuse, divorce, betrayal, death of a significant person, a life of religious duty and performance with little to no relational experience with God, never feeling truly loved or accepted by those who are supposed to love and accept you, a lack of intimacy with Dad, with Mom, or both, the lack of intimacy between Dad and Mom, and so on. The list of maladies is really endless.

But regardless of the cause, because of their pain they develop all sorts of dysfunctional survival mechanisms in order to cope and exist with the damage that sin (their own and the sin of others) has brought into their life. I use the word dysfunctional because even though many of the survival mechanisms pass public muster and are socially acceptable, they are not from God and do not bring a person deeper into trust and dependence upon God but actually keep them separated from all that they hope to experience in Him.

This highlights another point; most people at some level, whether they want to admit it or not, are extremely disappointed in God and in how He has supposedly watched over and protected them. Moreover, the Christianity we have been exposed to has done little to remedy our condition other than to help us pretend that the pain is not always present and our doubt in God is not at least as large as our belief.

This is so endemic that few Christians can even imagine a life free from such bondage. Like this man, they think that true healing is “impossible.” They roll out their mats next to the pool and settle into their life of emotional, psychological, and spiritual disappointment and exist either waiting for a miracle to happen or just

thinking that it will all get better on the other side. But either way they have believed a lie. Jesus has given each of us the ability to live as *new creations*. The miracle has already happened; we have been made new.

2 Corinthians 5:17-18

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

Sadly, most Christians have never heard, must less understood, that it is possible to live from their *New Creation* free from their own survival mechanisms and free from the dominating voice and presence of our *Old Man* constantly overpowering them. As a result, they either get discouraged and settle back down on their mats and wait a little longer or they try real hard to make Christianity work for them. It is for this reason that Christianity has in large part become a religion, not unlike any other man-made religion, and increasingly has a diminished impact on our culture.

But this is not the will of the Father for our lives; he wants us to take up our mat and by faith walk in the newness of life that He has given us. We have spent a lot of time talking about this can be your reality; and, if you have missed it, I encourage you to go to the website and listen to the earlier teachings for they walk you through the entire process of what it means to live by faith, which is the way of the *New Creation*. It is possible!

Getting back to our story, without hesitation (and remember, all eyes were probably on Him), Jesus told the man,

John 5:8-9

"Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!" Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking!

This man was instantly healed. He heard the voice of God and at that moment his reality was turned upside down and inside out. He was healed! He did not have to do anything to earn it, he did not have to display some great act of faith or even believe (remember, he had no idea who he was talking to), and he did not have to find a way to get in the water (it's not like Jesus pushed him in or anything). He was just healed when Jesus spoke the word. That is it! This was a God thing.

Personally, every time I read this story I am taken back. There were so many sick people in that place and Jesus had the power to heal them all and fix their sad, tragic, and broken lives. After all, that would have, in my mind, been the loving, responsible, and "Christian" thing to do for someone who was in full time ministry. But I have to constantly remind myself however of those powerful and humbling words in Isaiah.

Isaiah 55:8-9

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.

It is hard, but we need to take comfort in these words and rejoice that Jesus lived only to do the will of the Father; nothing more, nothing less. We need to relax our

view of what is right and wrong and trust that the Father knows best; and be thankful that we were included in His plan of healing. I want you to stop and think, just for a moment, about all the sick and broken people there are all over this world, but for some reason, the Father had Jesus come and heal you. You did not deserve to be given new life; there was nothing special about you. There are people who are more broken than you were and who have been dealing with it longer than you. You were just one in the masses of humanity that were hopelessly damaged and God, in a seemingly random act of mercy, picked you for healing and new life. Honestly, every time I think about this I just want to fall on my face and just thank Him for choosing me and giving me a life that I did not deserve.

Jesus told this man to pick up his sleeping mat, and walk. Why do you think He did not just tell Him to stand up and walk? Why do you think the mat was important? After all, as we read in the next part of the story, this mat became the very source of conflict with the religious leaders. I have mused on this for a while and I don't think it was random; Jesus never did anything that was random.

I think there are a couple of things going on. Ok, it was probably a set up for the whole ensuing dialogue that John records, but I think Jesus was communicating something very important to this man and to us as well. Consider the fact that despite what God says, how clear He says it, and despite what we experience with Him, it seems our first and most natural tendency is to doubt. Sure this man was standing, he could walk, and he seemingly had new life; but would it last, would it continue? Was it really real?

This is the same thing we do. Sure we have new life, we know our sins have been forgiven, but we doubt if it is really real; we doubt the very words of God. Despite our experience we doubt that we have been made new or that we can actually live from the New Creation free from the demands and expectations of our

old life. As a result, we make our concessions, our compromises, and reserve certain parts of our old life for ourselves, just in case. We essentially leave our mat on the ground reserving our spot so, if necessary, we can go back to our place of comfort and familiarity no matter how sick and rotten the place really is. That is not what Jesus wants of us. He wants us to leave that place and take our mat with us and walk. No reservations, no contingencies, no concessions; just get up and walk in the miracle that is ours.

John 5:9-13

But this miracle happened on the Sabbath, so the Jewish leaders objected. They said to the man who was cured, "You can't work on the Sabbath! The law doesn't allow you to carry that sleeping mat!" But he replied, "The man who healed me told me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" "Who said such a thing as that?" they demanded. The man didn't know, for Jesus had disappeared into the crowd.

This man obeyed Jesus and picked up his mat and walked away. But the religious leaders saw him doing something they considered to be unlawful—carrying his mat. Keep in mind that the Jews had developed so many laws, rules, and regulations concerning the Sabbath that they had for the most part forgotten what it was all about. The law said to honor the Sabbath and that no work was to be done on that day. The spirit and purpose of the law was so that people had a day to rest where they can dedicate themselves to the Lord. But the principle was lost in a pool of crazy man-made laws about what is and is not work. For example, you were not allowed to look in a mirror for fear that you might be tempted to pull out

a white hair and violate the prohibition of doing “work.” They said you could eat an egg that had been laid on the Sabbath, but you had to then kill the chicken for breaking the Sabbath.

The whole thing was ridiculous which is why they paid no attention to the fact that this man said he had been healed. I would have expected them to stop in their tracks: “Healed, what do you mean? Healed of what, when, how? You mean a miracle of God has taken place in our midst—wow? How is that possible? Praise the Lord this is fantastic. Let everyone know that our God is still the God we have always heard about. Let everyone worship and praise Him for this miracle.” That’s the kind of response I would expect; after all, it’s not every day you see a real live legitimate miracle. But Healing or no healing, to them it was unconscionable that someone would encourage rebellion to the law.

John 5:14

Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you."

This is an intriguing verse which I believe has often been misinterpreted. Most people follow the line of thinking which was prevalent back in the 1st century of equating sin with sickness, as if Jesus was telling this man that if he continued to sin, he might find himself with some other horrible disease. That may have been the case, we do know that people often face horrible physical consequences for their sin; but the way they envisioned it in this automatic “cause and effect” way is not valid. Besides, if you take the entire passage in context, especially the text we covered last week, it’s difficult to conclude that Jesus was warning this man about

sin that leads to sickness. I believe Jesus was giving this man a warning regarding the eternal consequences of sin.

John 5:28-29

Don't be so surprised! Indeed, the time is coming when all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of God's Son, and they will rise again. Those who have done good will rise to experience eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to experience judgment.

Few situations could be worse than one where you are stuck laying around sick for 38-years unable to do anything about your condition. Yet, that is nothing compared to an eternity separated from God where you continually reap the full consequences of your sin in a place that is described in such a horrible way that none of us wants to have anything to do with that place. Without question, eternity without God is a far worse outcome which is why Jesus warned this man.

John 5:15-18

Then the man went and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him. So the Jewish leaders began harassing Jesus for breaking the Sabbath rules. But Jesus replied, "My Father is always working, and so am I." So the Jewish leaders tried all the harder to find a way to kill him. For he not only broke the Sabbath, he called God his Father, thereby making himself equal with God.

The religious leaders wasted no time at all in coming after Jesus. I can imagine this pack (it seems they always traveled in packs) of religious leaders gave the temple a once over until they found this law breaker. Can you imagine the nerve to chastise someone for performing a supernatural miracle of mercy and compassion? Hello! What is wrong with these guys? Sabbath or not, if a miracle has been performed, then God is at work for only God can heal the sick. Unbelievable! Jesus probably had a look of total shock and disbelief on His face when He said: “My Father is always working, and so am I.”

This simple response, however, was powerful and targeted right at their sore spot. This statement would have burned in their souls. Although honoring the Sabbath is the 4th commandment, it was based on *Genesis 1* where God rested on the 7th day of creation. They probably thought that God still rested on that day. But we know that ever since creation was damaged by sin, the Father has been busy redeeming all things unto His Son; and this work won't stop until all is completed, whether it is Sabbath day or not.

Jesus states that since His own Father—which they knew full well was a reference to God—actually works on the Sabbath He is likewise fully authorized to do work on the Sabbath—Dad said it was ok. This infuriated them for once again Jesus made a claim of deity. He made Himself equal with God. But instead of hearing and believing, they just wanted to kill Him. They did not even give any weight to the fact that He performed a miracle. They simply refused to believe.

This seems to be the whole story so far in John, a contrast between those who hear and choose to believe verses those who hear, see, and still refuse to believe. This starts an extended monologue by Jesus where He addresses their unbelief. We covered part of it last week, and it will probably take us the next couple of weeks to finish it. But let's stop here for tonight and just consider what we have learned

or can surmise from this story. It's time to stop and consider which side of the "contrast" you fall into. Are you one who is willing to believe because you have heard the Word of the Lord or are you one who has heard, has seen and is constantly demanding God to prove Himself to you? Do you have your eyes fixated on your view of what is right and wrong, your view of how God is supposed to work? Have you simply refused to believe? Remember *Ephesians 5:1* says that we are to follow the Lords example in all things. Therefore:

- God chose us for life because He wanted to. We did not deserve it; there is nothing about us that makes us special. It was all an act of His mercy and grace.
- We were all irreparably broken; which is why all things had to be made new. God will have nothing to do with our *old life*; it's a life He wants us to abandon.
 - We are to make no reservations for our old life. Jesus wants us to take up our proverbial mat and walk and not look back or once again swallow the lies that there is safety and protection in that place of sickness and dysfunction.
 - We are to understand that despite the community or family that we have established for ourselves in our sickness, this is not the community or family in which He wants us to live. Jesus is calling us out of that community and into a place of fellowship and intimacy with Him in the Temple of God—which is the *New Creation*.

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- Our lives should be lived only to do the will of God for the humility of submission is the foundation of true belief.
 - This implies that we must be able to know the will of God and that God will actually reveal it to us (which is a point we will cover next week).
 - In addition, living for the will of God is in effect synonymous with walking in the Spirit of God and living from your *New Creation* for the *New Creation* lives only for this purpose. We know this because your *New Creation* is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit which always brings glory to the Son.
 - Despite our doubts and the difficulty we have believing that we can live new lives free from the voice, influence and dominance of the *Old Man*; we must hear and believe the Word of the Lord.
 - The Father is always working to bring His work of redemption to fruition; and, therefore, we must always live to fulfill the work which God has specifically appointed for us such that the will of the Father in heaven is done here on earth in and through our lives.
 - This means we must be willing to surrender and abandon our traditional views of ministry, serving God, obedience to the call, and so on, and only do what He tells us to do regardless of our gifting, the opportunity, or the expectations of others.

This is radical living. This is how you experience eternity now. This is the will of God for your life. Let's Pray