



Series: So That You May Believe

Date: June 2, 2024

Speaker: Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor

Text: John 5:1-15¹

Title: Healing on the Sabbath

STARTING POINT

Hey, every month right after our worship gathering, we hold a brief sort of welcome and orientation to who we are at Mercy Church, and we call it Starting Point. Bout 20 minutes.

If you've been coming to mercy but have just been in the "checking us out" kind of stage, you need to come

¹ 1 WORKS CONSULTED

F. F. Bruce. The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable? Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003.

D. A. Carson, The Gospel according to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 240-246.

to a starting point. The more you read the Bible, the more you see the church called Jesus' family, bride, and body. He always draws people from audience members to followers to participants. He never calls the church his audience; he calls them to more. So that's what we want for you.

Starting Point is where you can learn who we are AND get any questions answered you might have about the church. We are big here on helping people take their next steps in following Jesus, and maybe that is your next step.

PRAYER NIGHT TONIGHT

Hey, one more thing for everyone - TONIGHT is our prayer night at all 3 of our campuses. From 6 to 7. I am asking the Lord to use this summer to awaken us to our deep need for him and to the great value of prayer. I really want us to become a people of BOLD & EXPECTANT PRAYER. And my prayer is that tonight will be a fresh log on the fire of our faith here at Mercy. We are going to sing just a little, we are going to hear some powerful testimonies, and we are going to PRAY. Here's what we are going to pray for:

Tim Keller, "Seeing Jesus: The Pool," (Redeemer City Church, New York, NY, February 2, 2014), accessed May 28, 2024, <https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/the-pool/>

Andreas J. Köstenberger, Signs of the Messiah: An Introduction to John's Gospel (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 63-84.

John Piper, "Healed for the Sake of Holiness," (Place, AUGUST 23, 2009), accessed May 28, 2024, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/healed-for-the-sake-of-holiness#full-audio>



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- We are going to pray for God to heal the sick among us.
- We are going to pray for God to comfort & strengthen & bring relief those suffering in difficult situations
- We are going to pray for God to provide facilities for each of our 3 campuses. Several of you have asked me where we are on this - we are in the difficult but faith-building place of doing all we can AND waiting on the Lord.

This is one of those all-calls. Doing it on a Sunday night but not too late, hoping many of you can come and hoping traffic is not too much of a burden. Now, here's the deal - we are fasting all day in preparation for this. We will break fast through communion together. If you ate this morning - no worries. Fast from here forward. The goal of fasting is to come hungry for the Lord. Ok - On to our sermon for today.

SERMON JOHN CHAPTER 5

We are in a series of 7 sermons looking at 7 miracles performed by Jesus that are recorded in the gospel of John. Only John doesn't call them miracles, he calls them signs. And he says while Jesus performed a lot of them, the reason John put these signs into his gospel is

31 But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by

believing you may have life in his name. -- John 20:31 (CSB)

And what we are seeing with each sign is how much Jesus loves people and how powerful he is and how he uses that power to bless. Every sign is filled with goodness. There's no sign here of Jesus just saying, "BE SICK!" no, all the signs make people better off than before they encounter him. The signs are good. That's why the early church prayed for more of them in Acts 4. Because his power is still in the church so signs can still be performed. And the purpose of the signs is STILL - to believe that Jesus is the Messiah the son of God and by believing we will have life in his name. So, our theme is:

If you've been here...our big idea is what...

Signs are good, and Jesus is better

Tonight, as we pray for signs - if God should grant them the way we ask we'll give thanks and say - Jesus is better. And if he withholds we'll say - Jesus is better.

Well today we are going to see Jesus heal someone who had been suffering for a long time. Last week we learned all about FAITH during family discipleship Sunday. Today we'll see him heal someone, but the outcome is different. And that's because the sign is telling us something different about Jesus than the other one. Remember each has a purpose. Last week Jesus healed the son of a Royal Official and his whole



household believed. And there will be some overlap from there in how healing should lead us to the great healer. But today the response is very different. Today the person who gets healed...doesn't follow Jesus. Not only that, but the local religious leaders also get mad at Jesus for healing someone on the wrong day of the week. See last week we saw someone who recognized the healing was a sign & he followed the sign to faith & the result was the blessing of faith for his whole household. This week we'll see why, if these signs are so obvious, why do people miss Jesus? We'll see a lame man get healed by Jesus and still miss him. And then we'll see religious leaders who know the bible really well...still miss him. And we'll talk about what our response should be. But I'm telling you - don't miss Jesus like these folks do. Let's get into it.

But first let's go through it:

1 After this, a Jewish festival took place, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2 By the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool, called Bethesda in Aramaic, which has five colonnades. 3 Within these lay a large number of the disabled — blind, lame, and paralyzed. 5 One man was there who had been disabled for thirty-eight years.

Ok let's talk about this pool for a second. You astute observers noticed that I went from verse 3 to verse 5. And you REALLY astute observers checked your bible and realized...verse 4 isn't in yours either. OR IF IT IS,

there's some kind of note about it. Well, let's talk about this. Especially since the missing verse says "waiting for the moving of the water, 4 because an angel would go down into the pool from time to time and stir up the water. Then the first one who got in after the water was stirred up recovered from whatever ailment he had" Jn 5:3b-4.

Okay, here's what I want to do: I want to take about five minutes to discuss this as a case study in SHOULD YOU TRUST the historical reliability of the **Bible**.

I told you today is all about making sure you don't miss Jesus. For some, your lack of trust in the Bible is why you've been missing the power and love of Jesus. You find it hard to believe the Bible is accurate and reliable, and therefore, you struggle to think you can trust it at all. So, set aside five minutes to consider the reliability of John 5. If you are like, "Nah, that's not me," well, the rest of us will see you in five minutes.

We are going to talk about the text and then the pool. The earliest manuscripts of the New Testament did NOT have the second half of verse 3 nor verse 4 in them. So, virtually all modern translations have left them as a historical footnote which is where they belong. Why are they in there at all then? Well, when King James authorized an English translation in 1611 the manuscript they had access to at the time had it in there. And 400 years later that's still a popular English translation.



The point in taking those verses out was to make the text as accurate to the original as possible. But they are kept as a historical footnote because nobody is trying to hide anything. See unlike most ancient documents there is an ABUNDANCE of evidence that the bible we are looking at today is the bible as it was originally written and put together. Also, FWIW - pretty much every time an angel shows up in the bible - you know it. They aren't invisible & subtle. They are bright as fire, and they stop everything. And MOST importantly - biblical scholars went to great lengths to be transparent with your English bible over something that doesn't really matter. The point is not the pool, the point is Jesus. And there are NO questionable texts about the birth, life, death, or resurrection of Jesus or why any of that happened.

The other thing about this pool - In the early 19th century historians said...there's no evidence there was ever a pool like this in Jerusalem and the idea that it had 5 colonnades which is like a modern day "porch" - Think covered roof for shade but not walled in. Well historians of the 19th century said there was no architecture LIKE THAT at that time so - that proved there was never any pool and this whole thing was made up later by John....and that was used in the academic argument against the historical reliability of the bible.

That is until archeologists discovered the pool. F.F. Bruce in his book "The New Testament Documents, Are

they reliable?" Brought this up and said yes this was the argument...until archeologists found the pool. BTW this excavation wasn't some just some Christian tour group it was a bunch of professional archeologists doing a real dig. And they found the pool under a church planted on that location to mark where the pool was. And when they uncovered the pool they found it divided into two pools with a little rock ridge between them and there were two porches on one, two on the other, and one on the ridge. 5 porches. However, it was most likely destroyed to ruins when Jerusalem was sacked by Rome, so most people in history wouldn't have known about it. Nonetheless, the Bible was proven reliable.

Close this little historical reliability side quest by saying why it matters:

IF the bible is just a motivational book to inspire you to live a better life - if it's about YOU being better so that God will approve of YOU - then the historical accuracy isn't that big of a deal. You just take the lessons and try to live up to them. Be good like Jesus, do good things, etc. The point is the life lesson, the perspective. Who cares if it's true.

BUT - if the bible is a historical account of what God did for you - If IS in fact written as an account of good news about events that happened and your eternity hinges on whether or not they happened - well then the bible better be accurate. Because your whole eternity is at stake. And what historians and scholars



and scientists all keep uncovering time and again is that the bible is wonderfully reliable. The bible is the only ancient source I know of where the farther away we get in time from the events...the MORE reliable it gets, not less.

And maybe today hearing this allows you to set aside your skepticism for a moment so that you can hear the message this reliable book is trying to tell you. **OK, Side Quest Over.**

Let's get back into our account and see what God is telling us about himself

5 One man was there who had been disabled for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and realized he had already been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to get well?" 7 "Sir," the disabled man answered, "I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I'm coming, someone goes down ahead of me."

38 years is a long time. Like...a long time. And we don't know how long that is for him. Is it half his life? Is it his whole life? We aren't told we just know he's been laying there suffering for a long time. SO CLOSE to the thing he thought could heal him. Like healing was...as he understood it...just out of reach. And had been his whole life.

The belief at the time - not fact, just local myth - was that the first to get down into the water when the water stirred up...would be healed. And clearly

something was happening otherwise people would stop coming. But the point is - people kept jumping him in line. THEY kept getting the healing...the miracle...the blessing.... they kept getting what HE wanted.

Helplessly waiting for his turn having no power to change the circumstance on his own. I think we have these pools in our lives right? We suffer long enough in something, and we desire water we can't seem to get to. If we could just get there, we'd be happy & fulfilled. For some of us the water is a spouse. If I could just get married. For some of us the water is children. For some of us the water is a promotion. Keep getting overlooked. For some of us its acceptance. If my dad would accept me, or church friends, or SOMEBODY...and it seems so close but still out of reach. Maybe your ailment is a physical ailment. If I could just get healed from this chronic illness...THEN I could flourish.

And I think it's not an accident Jesus asked him "do you want to get well" NOT "do you want me to help you get in the water?" Because in the previous chapter...John 4...Jesus is standing by a local watering well and said to the Samaritan woman

"Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. 14 But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life." -- John 4:13-14



The water that leads to eternal life is JESUS. And what I believe Jesus is trying to show some of you is that signs are good, but Jesus is better! Healing is good and Jesus is the greater healing. Water is good - Jesus is the true and living water. Next week we'll see food is good, but Jesus is the bread of life! He's saying over and over signs are good and Jesus is better.

And to demonstrate that very truth - Jesus doesn't help him to the pool. Jesus is not here to help you get where you want to go. He's not here to help you get what you THINK will make you better. Jesus wants you to redirect the eyes of your heart onto him. So instead of helping him to the water, he just speaks. And as we saw last week there is nothing more powerful in the universe than the words of Jesus.

8 "Get up," Jesus told him, "Pick up your mat and walk."
9 Instantly the man got well, picked up his mat, and started to walk.

Praise God! How awesome! Jesus spoke. And at his words this man was healed. He stood up & started to walk. Even strong enough to carry his mat. He didn't have muscle atrophy that needed a lot of PT to overcome. In fact, 38 years of not walking - he wouldn't have muscle to walk. Jesus had to CREATE muscle & blood flow & balance & all the things so this man could carry something.

He just started walking. THAT is healing. So powerful. So surely everyone around starts jumping up and

down and marveling right? Surely everyone starts waving and saying JESUS come over here. Well, in many places John says that is what happened. But not here. THEY. MISS JESUS. watch.

Now that day was the Sabbath, 10 and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "This is the Sabbath. The law prohibits you from picking up your mat."

Oh boy. If you are just reading along in the bible. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. By the time you get to John, and you see "the day was the sabbath" you are probably thinking "oh boy." Nothing triggers the Jewish leaders like Jesus working on the sabbath. Well, the law they are referring to is the law of resting & not working on the sabbath. Honoring how God chose to rest on the 7th day after creating the world in 6 days. Well, the LAW says they are not supposed to work. And here's what had happened - over time the Jews had taken that command to rest from work and heaped a bunch of prohibitions onto it. 39 to be exact. These were the 39 traditions of the rabbis you were now supposed uphold if you really wanted to be a good Jew on the sabbath. One of them included the prohibition of carrying something from one place to another.

Jesus of course knows all this and so by saying take up your mat & walk he's not only healing the man, but he's confronting the traditions that have been built up around God's word.



And the Jews are so bound to their tradition they treat it as law. And I wonder - is this us sometimes in the church? Do we miss what God might be doing in someone's life unless because they don't behave according to our traditions we've set up?

Let's keep going here

11 He replied, "The man who made me well told me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' "12 "Who is this man who told you, 'Pick up your mat and walk'?" they asked. 13 But the man who was healed did not know who it was, because Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

He doesn't even know Jesus is JESUS at this point. But this guy is probably scared of these religious leaders, so he blames the guy who made him well. I didn't want to pick up my mat & walk...that guy made me do it. Greatest moment of his life where God had clearly done a work and its overshadowed by the fear of institutional religious tradition.

14 After this, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you are well. Do not sin anymore, so that something worse doesn't happen to you."

Jesus finds this man and says don't ignore what I've done for you. I have healed you. And my aim in healing your body is healing your soul. The healing comes first.

He didn't deserve it but Jesus in his compassion healed him. He didn't do anything worthy of being healed. Jesus is just compassionate. And he says...don't miss the point. Don't MISS JESUS. The point is eternity. Let my free gift of grace be motivation to live a life of holiness to the Lord. He says or something worse will happen. Well, I think he's got to be talking about eternity here. Because I'm not sure something WORSE than the 38 years he's been through. It seems he's warning this man not to miss the sign and wind up spending eternity apart from God. And that's what he's saying to us today too. Well let's wrap up this scene and then I'll help you see what it points to.

15 The man went and reported to the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. 16 Therefore, the Jews began persecuting Jesus because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. 17 Jesus responded to them, "My Father is still working, and I am working also." 18 This is why the Jews began trying all the more to kill him: Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God. -- John 5:15-18 (CSB)

Well now the shoe drops. I told you - these guys do not like people working on the sabbath. But they get all ragey because they see what Jesus is really doing. He's both demonstrating he is God and then claiming to be God. If you read John's gospel along with these 7 signs there are 7 times Jesus says I AM and each time in a different way he's saying I AM God. 7 Signs & 7



Statements and what is John's whole purpose - SO THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE!

But the Jews are not happy about this. They think he's breaking the sabbath but he's actually claiming authority over the sabbath. And saying the true sabbath rest is found not in tradition, but in him. Everyone in this encounter misses Jesus. How can you make sure you don't miss him? 3 responses I think God is calling us to:

Go to the living water & drink

The waters of this pool of Bethesda.... let's say for argument sake that some people did experience some form of healing when the waters stirred. IF so - they at their best were unpredictable, limited, and temporary.

And the whole point of the account is not the power of the pool but the power of Jesus. Whose healing power is constant. It's always available because he never changes. He is wonderfully constant in his offer of power extended to us. And his power is unlimited. It's abundant. The water turned into wine - it was an abundance of wine. The healing of the boy last week led to the salvation of his whole family. Abundance. Next week with the 5 loaves and 2 fish we'll see him create a feast with abundant leftovers. He's the living water and he offers you the abundant life

I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance. -- John 10:10

Will you stop trying to get to the waters that are unpredictable, limited, and temporary? Will you go to the living water and drink? This is an invitation to you who never have before and to you who maybe have in the past, but it's been a while. That's what we do week in and week out. It's available to you day in and day out in his word. It's available to you tonight in our prayer gathering. Come and drink the living water of Jesus.

Train yourself to look for and celebrate the work of God in others

The Jews missed the work of God because they were so caught up in their traditions. And if we aren't intentional in our choice to celebrate what God is doing... we too will create church traditions and then fall into judging people by them. I'm not saying we don't cling to the scriptures or call one another away from sin. Of course. But here's a for instance

The largest homeless population in Charlotte is less than a mile from our Providence Rd campus. When a homeless person comes in and smells different and looks different than most of us...where will your heart go? Will it go to celebrating that this man or woman is beside you? In the church hearing the gospel and in a place where they might find some HOPE? Might meet some of God's ambassadors who can extend love & care? Is your heart thinking...HERE...take my coat. Take my shoes. Let me buy you lunch. OR - are you thinking...I wonder what their motives are for being here?



A friend of yours who has been praying & asking the Lord for marriage - starts dating someone. Do you CELEBRATE the work of God or judge how they are handling themselves in the relationship? Like what is your first move? LET'S BE A PEOPLE WHO EXPECT GOD TO WORK AND THEN CELEBRATE HIS WORK!! Lest we wind up missing God because we are so bound to traditions.

BTW - by and large I see you looking for God to work. BUT - unless we train our hearts to look for God's work we will drift to judging people by our extrabiblical traditions. That's why we've put two of our 5 ministry values in place next to each other

We expect God to change a life today
We help people take their next step in following Jesus

God is the one doing the work...he's the one who changes hearts. And we are here to help you follow him as he does a work in your life. Does that describe you? If not, go back to the living water again. And find your rest in him. Leads me to the last take away from today.

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, so find your rest in him

This may be at the same time the most theologically layered thing I'll say today and also the most practical thing I'll say today. Hebrews 4 talks about this so go do more reading & study there but in short - The sabbath DAY was always intended to work like a sign. Pointing

us to our need for the Sabbath God. The physical rest from work was meant to point out to us that we are finite creatures dependent on an infinite God. God designed our bodies to need rest as a way to show us that our souls need rest. And they find their rest in him.

So, I told you its super practical - that's because you should probably take a day every week and rest. We have a pretty poor theology of work in our culture - we tend to operate as if work has a dimmer switch where we dim it down on our 'off' days which means we'll only check email SOME. but we are still "on." That's not rest from work. That's a slow jog instead of a sprint. We were made to rest. So practically - consider how you can rest each week. I don't mean veg out. I mean create margin to abide in Christ. To gather with God's people and worship. To allow God to restore you. Now are you BOUND to this as law? No. Because JESUS is the true rest. But its good wisdom to live according to how God created you.

But more importantly - find your soul's rest in him. And what you will find is that without him...your soul will work even when you are supposedly resting. Your soul will still be searching for true rest. BUT, when you abide in him - then even in your hours and season of most intense work - you will be resting. Your soul will be settled and at peace.

INVITATION / CLOSING PRAYER

