

Raised with a word

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[0:00] The idea that someone who couldn't walk for 38 years was healed. You might have thought if it had happened in your midst,! But let me tell you just a little bit of context.

This is Jerusalem, and the pool of Bethesda, I think this, does this have a little pointer? Top right, with a black ring round it.

Can you see that? And just below it is the sort of temple area, and actually you might just be able to pick out the other quite well-known pool down the bottom is Siloam.

But that's where the pool of Bethesda was. Sorry, I've mentioned the... Yes, actually, we'll come back to this, but Bethesda actually means the House of Mercy.

That's interesting, as you see in a minute, when we think about what actually happened there. But that's what it meant. It's about 50 by 100 metres.

[1:29] This has actually been uncovered by archaeologists. So with the five covered colonnades, do you remember that in the reading? It mentioned that. This is no fairy tale place.

It really is there. Someone has done a... I think one of these archaeologists has done this model.

That's what that picture is, with the red roofs. And it was a pool split into two parts.

The southern pool had broad steps with landings, and it would have been used for pilgrims, for ritual washing before worship. There's a name for that kind of thing, a mikveh.

But it's a real place. And it probably... One pool was where the washing and things happened. The other one was probably just to replenish the water. So just picture that north-east of Jerusalem within the city.

But I just want to pick this out in a few headings. I don't want to skim over too quickly the compassion theme.

[2:41] And if you picture this place in the corner of the city, a great number of disabled people used to be there. The blind, the lame, the paralysed.

And it's worth noticing, although I think you've got the gist of it from... If you look in the footnotes on the NIV, the second half of verse 3 and 4 are not in the earliest manuscripts.

You can actually read what they say in the footnote in the NIV. But it only spells out this idea that an angel stirred the water. And I think that if you were the first one to get your foot in, you might... you know, you're going to get healed.

This is not part of the biblical truth. But it was a superstition that these people hung on to. So if you picture this area, and particularly on the busyness of the...

There's a festival. That's mentioned in here as well. Busy Jerusalem. Much more people than usual. And all these people who couldn't work would be just sort of queuing up, keeping out the sun in the solid colonnades in this vague hope that they might just get a chance to get in the water and be healed.

[4:04] The superstition. A small hope, but even less if you couldn't move. No welfare state, I don't think, in this time of Israel.

We all know people who have got disabilities, some quite severe. And if you can't work because of your disability, in our country, the government will do something.

Many might think it's not enough, but there will be some attempts to try and look after you. These people would have been just relying on begging, very demeaning, and they wouldn't have been involved.

A lot of social life they would have missed out on. Broken people. Broken people in the city. Everyone else, perhaps, not in this area, just enjoying the festival. But this is a little corner where some very needy people are. And Jesus is interested in this place. And I don't want us to skip away from the fact that there are, you know, what about broken people today?

[5:15] You might not often see such a large number as might have been next to this pool, unable to do things, helpless.

But nevertheless, all around us, there are broken people. I suspect they're closer to you than you might think.

They're probably sitting right next to you. They might look all together on the outside. They might be able to walk. They might not have that infirmity. But people who are broken and scarred and damaged by life, they're all around us.

And I just want to, like Jesus was taking an interest here, I just don't want to skip past that. How do you feel towards broken people when you see them?

I suspect many of us do have the right kind of heart of wanting to care. But maybe we're so busy, we easily excuse ourselves from trying to be involved with trying to help, in some way, broken people.

[6:25] How did Jesus feel towards this broken person? We're told that there was one there who had been unable to walk.

You remember in the reading, 38 years. Can you imagine that kind of routine? Now, I don't think he would have lived and slept at this pool.

He would have probably had people to bring him there every day. They would have probably had to go off and work. And then they might have taken him home in the evening.

38 odd years. And what slender thread of a hope was he hanging on to get some relief from this affliction?

But Jesus saw him lying there. So Jesus picked him out. He learned that he'd been in this condition a long time.

[7:21] And he asked him, and I suspect you might have smiled when Phil read this question, do you want to get well? Do you want to get well?

Well, well, he felt compassion for him, so that's a lovely thing. And I'm just interested that he, as well as often having the attention of large crowds, this is Jesus one to one.

And elsewhere, we notice that Jesus had compassion on crowds of people. But I want to come back to this question and just explore it a bit. Do you want to get well?

Well, a penetrating question, which could have prompted I would have thought a variety of responses. And I think the first one I might have thought of is, what do you think I'm doing here? Waiting for the waters. He didn't know who Jesus was. What do you think I'm doing? You know, waiting. He was probably an old person. And if cured, his begging income would stop and he'd have to look for paid work.

[8:33] He may, most likely, had quite limited social skills. He wouldn't have been able to do very much. And begging wouldn't have looked very good on his CV looking for work.

Not a lot of work experience to draw on. We don't always want to change, do we? We always think, if something's obviously better, of course we would.

but actually the pattern of the way people live and relate suggests that they often just stick with what they know. What does he say?

I have no one to help me get into the pool when the water is stirred. Someone else always gets there ahead of me. He is depressed, I've put it to you, defeated and probably deep emotional scars. 38 odd years he's got used to this routine. No sense of just looking at Jesus even though he doesn't know who Jesus is. Do you want to get well? Yes.

[9:44] But, just, I have no one to help me. So that's the compassion theme which I just, is an important thing not to skip over and I want to bring that back to challenges again later.

But then he is raised, Jesus says, get up, pick up your mat and walk and at once the man was cured he picked up his mat and walked.

And in the story if you blink too hard you might miss this. It's just, it's just happened rather quickly. I'll give you just a picture I found this man who had not been able to get up now carrying his mat. Remarkable power that Jesus had over a long term disability. mercy. Mercy indeed in the context of this pool being called the house of mercy.

But in other ways if you were thinking of the hundreds or whatever they were a great number of people it perhaps looked initially as a rather house of misery I think for people. But mercy indeed. [11:03] And I just draw attention to the fact that the Old Testament does in places look forward to this kind of thing happening when God's kingdom and Jesus the Messiah comes.

This is in Isaiah 35. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy.

Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. So this kind of thing was talked about as very much expected to be the kind of thing that the Messiah can do.

But I wonder as you look at this are you not perhaps a bit more surprised more people weren't healed if there really were so many? And all I can offer to help us a little bit is that although the kingdom of God has broken into our age in Jesus we still live in this now and not yet and that at times you see remarkable signs of his power and his ability is beyond doubt but it doesn't always happen where you want it to.

You'd like to see many more people healed. God chooses to work through us fragile and sinful vessels we are.

[12:37] He is capable of doing this dramatic physical healing but in this now and not yet we must not presume upon it. We mustn't work ourselves up that if when we pray it doesn't happen exactly as we want that God has forgotten but we should still be willing to pray for big things as well as the small things.

so where do we start when so many around us are broken? I think even the snippets of even looking about the news of the church family with some who are older getting very frail and unwell. People who is like even younger people who have just had a traumatic past and they are scarred. where do we start? Do we sometimes feel we can do so little?

What difference can we make? Maybe many of us would just think there are so many I just don't know what to do. Where would I start?

I have mentioned and I'll skim over it a starfish story. Some of you will have remembered this but this is about a writer that used to walk by the beach.

[13:58] Early morning before he wrote he would walk along the beach and it just happened to be after a big storm that had thrown lots of starfish, hundreds of starfish on this beach.

Then he sees this little boy coming in the distance. He just sees this boy stopping and doing something and then carrying on. As he gets nearer he realises that he's picking up some of the starfish and throwing them back into the sea.

this wise man you might have thought he said well what's the point in doing that? You can't really make a difference. There are thousands of them.

To which the little boy smiles at him picks up another one and throws it in and said made a big difference to that one. And it's not a Christian theme story but I think many of us do identify this problem.

When you look out there and see so many problems, so many needy people, where do I start? At least just have the wisdom to do what you can. Don't think about ten people, think about one or two, do what you can.

[15:12] So that was the power of the raising with a word. What a dramatic thing that was.

But not far around the corner is the opposition that starts because the day, we are told in the second part of verse nine, the day on which this took place was a Sabbath.

And so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, it's the Sabbath. The law forbids you to carry your mat.

Now, that's another one that made me think, what a comment. Can you believe it for one moment? The first thing the Jewish leaders say when they witness this man who would have been there so

often for many, many years, the first thing they say, you're carrying your mat on a Sabbath. Can you believe it? I suppose I could just picture if I had a neighbour who was unable to walk for many, many years, and perhaps I'd seen him getting out in a wheelchair to go in the car somewhere and just always being helped and never able to be independent.

[16:39] And then on a Sunday morning, at seven in the morning, I hear him out there mowing the lawn from my first floor bedroom window, and I open the window, and what's the first thing I say? You shouldn't be doing that on a Sunday.

I don't think it would be the first thing I would say, but you'd be astonished, wouldn't you? How did you get better?

Surely. Anyway, so they are trying to find out who, yeah, the man who told me, you know, why are you carrying your mat?

The man who healed me. He told me to. So, just doing what I'm told. Who was he, the Jewish leaders asked. And this is where we discover that Jesus had slipped away into the crowd, and this man didn't know.

He had no idea. Don't forget, in the context, it will not be that long before Jesus comes back to Jerusalem, where this is the centre of the Jewish leaders and the hate that is beginning against him.

[17:50] Jesus is very deliberate, that he knows his time is not yet, and so he's not trying to advertise too highly what he is doing. Jesus slipped away in the crowd. So, we know what the Jewish leaders then thought about what you could and couldn't do on the Sabbath.

What actually does the Bible tell us in the Old Testament law? This is in Exodus 20. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, six days you shall labour and do all your work.

But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God, and on it you shall not do any work, neither you nor your son or daughter, your servants, animals, or foreigners living among you.

work. So, the principle is fairly clear to refrain from daily work, but the Jewish leaders had added extra rules, not in God's law, and a lot of them.

Now, John Stott helps us a little here. He says, there were 39 extra categories of work that were identified which breached the Sabbath law, and these included carrying anything except in the case of compassion.

[19:15] So, it's okay for others to carry a sick person on his mat, but it's not okay for anyone to carry a mat on its own.

Can you just try and get your head into the mentality of these people who had got their important religious position? Don't forget, the people at large would have looked to them if they had any thoughts about their eternal future and security and beyond death, that they would have been looking to these people and they had all these extra hoops to jump through that were not in the Bible.

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. And that's actually beginning to quote a little bit out of my text, but I will just read a couple of things to whet your appetite.

I think Phil read them as well. He talked to these Jewish leaders, as his father was always at work, so was he, Jesus said. And because of this, they tried all the more to kill him.

So, you see where this is going in terms of his, how the Jewish leaders thought of him. But then, we move on.

[20:41] Jesus has not quite finished with this man who had been healed and was now walking. And it says in the end of our passage, 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. Can you see that Jesus is looking, he would have had special insights, being God, he would have, like in other stories we've had at the woman at the well where he knew all about her home past.

Jesus would know without having a long conversation where this man has come from. And he has got a key extra message for him, stop sinning or something else will happen to you.

Jesus is looking beyond the physical healing to something more important. Now, an individual's sin, certainly in the, I think in the examples in the Bible, is very rarely the direct cause of their being sick.

But I think in this case, in the way this story comes out, it probably was. And we're left not really knowing how he responded.

[22:02] But he was challenged to think, stop sinning, something there was, not just the occasional lapse, there was something rather continuous going on that he needed to turn away from if he was going to come and follow Jesus.

So there was a call to repent as well as this physical healing. But what did he do? As much as we are told, he actually betrayed Jesus back to the Jewish leaders.

The man went away and he told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well. So this man is not shining very brightly to us as he encountered this Jesus.

So let me just pull a few things together and ask you a few questions which I hope will challenge you. We started on the theme of compassion and can I just ask you to think, do you allow the needs of others to impact you?

Because the compassion of Jesus towards a broken person is very much a challenge to us. That's not to say that we need wisdom and sometimes we see something and we feel compassionate, we'd like to help, but then you need a bit of wisdom on what to do, because not always doing what they want is the right thing.

[23:36] But do you allow the needs of others to impact you? And if you're overwhelmed, can you at least remember that wisdom to just pick one or two things, not get buried by ten and think I can't do anything?

We are these sinful broken vessels that God is using to minister to other people and help them. You may be even used to dramatically heal someone through a prayer.

Rare, I think, these days, but God is capable of doing such things. And in our conversations with people, can you find your own way of asking, do you want to get well?

Because actually, a lot of people fundamentally don't want to know anything about Jesus. They'll listen to you for a little bit. They kind of think they're okay.

so there's the problem. They don't really know that they're unwell. And at least in the area of sin and needing sin to be forgiven, this is such an important thing to do with our eternal future.

[24:54] Do you want to get well? You need to find your own way of asking these questions, because there's none so blind as those who will not see. me. And although it was quick, the command get up, I mean, something happened in his body or he wouldn't have tried, would he?

But he did, he got up. We need to stand in awe of the power of God. this is no clever magic trick of fast moving of the hands to move a card where you didn't see it.

This was the remarkable power of God on display. His kingdom had broken in, though as we've touched on, there's still this now and not yet.

And then remember to, apart from encouraging us to be aware of people's needs, think of people's souls as well as physical needs. This is not in terms of trying to clock up numbers, but ultimately we're only on this stage in life for a very brief time and the Bible is very clear, we have an eternal soul and one day when we die, we go, it couldn't be more important what you've done with Jesus, whether you've believed in him.

It could not be more important and everything will hinge on that because he's the only way that sin can be forgiven. think of people's souls as well as their physical needs because Jesus certainly did.

[26:36] But then don't be surprised that many don't respond well to Jesus because I kind of like to think, I mean I find this hard that if Jesus was doing something like this and we all saw it, how could there be anyone who wouldn't be kneeling down and saying you are God but it does seem that actually an awful lot of people react not very well and there's something about Jesus' words and his teaching and I think the Bible does things that it divides people.

Some are drawn to Jesus but others it just, it's like it drives them away but the call is and the warning to us, don't dismiss this Jesus.

Neither the man healed or the Jewish leaders do well, that's an understatement in this story. God's truth does divide people but we need to keep praying don't we?

If you realise how hard some people's hearts are we need to keep on praying. So there are in John 7 sign miracles, that's a special word we've touched on in the previous messages, the signs in John 7 sign miracles, this is actually number three and I will, this has come up in a few of our sermons because towards the end of John it just reminds us of the reason that John has selected just a few of these miracles.

it says Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.

[28:37] and so the question I just want to leave you with is do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah?

I hope you can say yes. Let's just leave it there. Thank you. Shall we pray? Shall we pray?