

Do You Want to Get Well?

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. This is a reading from the Gospel of John, chapter 5, verses 1-30. Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethsaida, and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.

Here a great number of disabled people used to lie, the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for 38 years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, Do you want to get well?

Sir, the invalid replied, 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. Then Jesus said to him, Get up, pick up your mat, and walk.

[1 : 15] At once the man was cured. He picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath. And so the Jewish leader said to the man who had been healed, It is the Sabbath.

The law forbids you to carry your mat. But he replied, The man who made me well said to me, Pick up your mat and walk. So they asked him, Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk? The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. 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. The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well. So because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him.

In his defense, Jesus said to them, My father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working. For this reason, they tried all the more to kill him.

[2 : 14] Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God. Jesus gave them this answer, Very truly I tell you, the son can do nothing by himself.

He can do only what he sees his father doing, because whatever the father does, the son also does. For the father loves the son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed.

For just as the father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the son gives life to those whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the son, that all may honor the son just as they honor the father.

Whoever does not honor the son does not honor the father who sent him. Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and will not be judged, but has crossed over from death to life.

Very truly I tell you, a time is coming, and has now come, when the dead will hear the voice of the son of God, and those who hear will live. For the father has life in himself, so he has granted the son also to have life in himself.

[3 : 27] And he has given him authority to judge, because he is the son of man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice, and come out.

Those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing. I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I

seek not to please myself, but him who sent me.

This is the gospel of the Lord. Good morning, Christ Church. I wonder if you've seen the new billboards around town. I just saw them this past week.

I don't know how long they've been up, but the billboard says this. It says, the pandemic has taken a toll on all of us. Let's reset together. Now all Berkeley residents can download the Headspace and My Strength apps for free.

Help at hand, ca.org slash Berkeley. Berkeley Wellness for All. Have you seen that billboard?

There's a bunch of them around town. And I'm really pleased about this initiative.

[4 : 31] It started over the past three months, I think. I'm really pleased to see that the New York Times has increased their reporting over the last month or so about the need to pivot our attention to the mental health and social well-being crisis, particularly among our kids and our adolescents.

I imagine many of us are longing for this reset, thinking, you know, my mental health and my social well-being could probably be improved a little bit. Is that just me or do you feel that way?

Okay. We want to be a spiritually and emotionally healthy church, and that's why we're working to create times and spaces like Wonderful Wednesdays, where our kids and our youth can come together in belonging and meaningful, life-giving relationships, where our adults have the opportunities on a regular basis to share dinner and discussions and be encouraged and challenged in our faith.

So I just want to urge you to find that place, whether it's Wonderful Wednesdays or a community group or both, where you can be a part of this caring, present community, this family of faith that we have here at Christ Church.

If you struggle with depression and anxiety, welcome to the club. And if you are needing to work on an addiction or need a relationship tune-up, you are not alone.

[5 : 54] We have many caregivers in this community. We have a list of counselors that we could refer you to. We have a deacon fund that could help you get to counseling. We really are committed.

I think that billboard's right. We need a reset. It's taken its toll, and we want to work on this together as a community. But that said, mental health apps are good, but they have their limits.

And individuals and groups and the church and caregivers and counselors and pastors, it's all good, but they're extremely limited in what they can do for us.

But I'd like to say this morning that Jesus is unlimited. Jesus is unlimited in his ability to meet us at our point of need. And what's interesting to me is that Jesus habitually healed sick and hurting people.

In fact, one-fifth of all the material in the four Gospels is concerned with the healing of physical diseases, which includes maladies and afflictions not only of the body but of the mind and of the spirit.

[7 : 03] Jesus, in his healings, he's putting people back into their right mind. He's putting people back into right and healthy relationships with their families and their communities.

He's putting people, most importantly, back into a right relationship with their creator God. And so whatever your needs are that you're bringing today, I hope that you'll be thinking about that, that Jesus is unlimited in his ability to meet our needs.

And as we dive into this story in John chapter 5, I want to point out that Jesus makes shocking claims. He heals the helpless and he shows us how to walk free.

That's where we're going to go. That Jesus makes shocking claims, heals the helpless, and shows us how to walk free. First of all, Jesus makes some shocking claims. When you're studying a historical person, it's really important to listen to the reports of their supporters and their detractors and to really hear how people are understanding the character of this historical figure.

How did they act with their deeds? What did they say with their words? And this healing is a clear example of how people were interpreting Jesus and his astonishing works and claims.

[8 : 22] Jesus here performs an act of God. He does what only God could do. He creates in this invalid the capacity and the strength to get up and walk off. And only the creator can restore his decaying and dying creation.

So it's astonishing and therefore it needs some explaining. And that's what Jesus does in verse 17. In his defense, Jesus said to them, This you had been an invalid for 38 years.

Jesus could have waited another 24 hours to heal him. So why does he choose to heal on the Sabbath day? Why does he choose to heal on the day that the creator God called holy and blessed?

Well, the rabbis agreed that God did not practice the Sabbath, that God worked ceaselessly to sustain and restore his creation moment by moment, so that if the sun didn't come up, you wouldn't get up and the whole world would collapse.

But as we know, on the Sabbath, you know, babies are still born and the rain falls and people die. God is at work on the Sabbath. And though God preaches the Sabbath for us and for our good, he does not practice what he preaches because he doesn't need it.

[9 : 42] God is all sufficient. And so Jesus is provocative in his choice of this day on which to do his work of healing.

What does Jesus' implicit claim that he makes explicit in verse 17? He's saying, you know, like the creator God, I don't need a Sabbath either.

For on this day, I continue to preserve and to renew the universe just as my father does. You're not dealing with a mere mortal who keeps the Sabbath. You're dealing with the God who doesn't.

I'm on the different side of the line than you are. I'm with my father and we never stop working to restore our creation. Now, what's the rule for historical investigation?

It is to see how do the people understand this person in context. And the people around Jesus have no doubt about what he's claiming.

[10 : 45] In verse 18, In their minds, it's right to put Jesus to death if he, as a mere mortal, is claiming to be equal with God.

Now, buckle up and hold on tight because Jesus uses this opportunity to launch into a little sermonette about his authority where he gets even more explicit about his identity, about who he is. And he says in verse 19, Very truly, I tell you, the son can do nothing by himself. He can do only what he sees his father doing because whatever the father does, the son also does.

For the father loves the son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these so that you will be amazed. The son is the perfect revelation of God so that what God does in heaven, the son does on earth so that when you see Jesus, you see God.

That's what he just said. Jesus goes further in verse 21. For just as the father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

[12 : 03] Only God can give life to those who are physically and spiritually dead. And Jesus says, I too share in that creative, life-giving power. Verse 22.

Moreover, the father judges no one but has entrusted all judgment to the son. Now, it would be ridiculous if I came and said, Hey, guess what? I have the right and the authority to judge all humanity.

You would laugh at me because you know I can barely, like, tie my shoes. I can barely love my family, love my friends, love my church, much less have the justice to judge all humanity.

We know that that's only God's job. And Jesus says, Well, God, guess what? He gave that job to me. He goes on. Verse 23. If you don't honor Jesus for what he just said he is, as the life giver and the judgment giver, then you're not honoring God at all.

But if Jesus has this kind of power and this kind of authority to do these kind of things, then we should render to him all the honor he deserves and all the obedience he requires.

[13 : 19] Now do we understand all the hostility toward Jesus. Now do we understand why it is they wanted to kill him. This is a great quote from a book called God on the Dock by a professor at Oxford and Cambridge named C.S. Lewis.

And the chapter is, What are we to make of Jesus Christ? He says this, If you had gone to Buddha and asked him, Are you the son of Brahma? He would have said, My son, you are still in the veil of illusion.

If you had gone to Socrates and asked, Are you Zeus? He would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Muhammad and asked, Are you Allah? He would have first rent his clothes and then cut your head off. If you had asked Confucius, Are you heaven?

I think he would have probably replied, Remarks which are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste. The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question.

In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion which undermines the whole mind of man.

[14 : 26] We may note in passing that he was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that kind of effect on any of the people who actually met him. He produced mainly three effects, hatred, terror, adoration.

There was no trace of people expressing mild approval. This story tells us that it's very easy to not look at what we don't want to see and that it's very common to ignore the evidence that's staring us in the face because it's extremely demanding if it's true.

Notice how these people respond to the healing in verse 10. So the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, It is the Sabbath. The law forbids you to carry your mat.

But he replied, The man who made me well said to me, Pick up your mat and walk. So they asked him, Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk? This man has been lying here for 38 years.

He's just been healed. He jumps up, presumably leaping around out of his mind with joy. And what is the question he's asked? Why are you carrying your mat?

[15 : 43] Now there's a simple answer to that question. That is, If you're healed, then you're inclined to do everything that the healer tells you to do, right? If you, if somebody gives me life to my basically good as dead self, then I'm bound to do whatever it is they tell me to do.

But for these skeptics, they turn a blind eye. They don't want to look in the direction of the evidence. The healed invalid calls Jesus the man who made me well, but the skeptics call Jesus the man who told you to pick up your mat.

That's selecting the evidence we like and ignoring the evidence we don't like. For how can we focus on the minor mat-carrying second fact and ignore the major life-changing first fact that this paralytic is leaping for joy?

You can only make such comments if you've determined a priori that you're not going to look at the evidence and recognize what's just happened. And so that's the question for us and for everybody really is, what about you?

What do you make of Jesus? What do you make of his shocking claims? What do you, what viewpoint do you take? Do you see Jesus as a mere mortal who makes claims he has no business making and cannot back them up?

[17 : 08] Or do you see him as one, self-described in verse 21, as one who gives life to whom he's pleased to give it? And that's something we have to wrestle with if you're exploring Christianity.

You have to wrestle with these shocking claims that Jesus makes. But Jesus not only makes shocking claims, he heals the helpless. He not only makes shocking claims, he backs them up by healing the helpless.

And I want to turn our attention to the story in verse 3. It says that Jesus came to Jerusalem and when he got there, he went to this particular place where there was a great number of disabled people who used to lie, the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed.

Jesus moves not toward the privileged, but toward the paralyzed. And we can imagine the misery of this pitiful crowd of broken, desperate people that are half dead.

They're the living dead. Paraplegics, as you might know, have no bladder or bowel control. So you can imagine the refuse, the filth, and the stench of this place where Jesus decides to go.

[18 : 19] And he gets there in verse 5 and it says that one who was there had been an invalid for 38 years. Been there a long time. Before Jesus was born, this guy was there.

38 years ago, I was five years old. Right? 38 years ago, some of you only existed in the mind of God. It's a long time for your muscles and your legs to waste away and your limbs to become totally not useful.

He has no capacity to walk, no strength, no balance. But what's interesting is that his story is even more complex than what we see, you know, with our own five senses, as all of our stories are.

Why did Jesus choose to heal this particular guy? Well, because he has no ability. Because he's incurable. He's stuck. He's impotent and utterly helpless and hopeless.

And what's interesting here is that his outward physical capacity and condition mirrors the inward spiritual condition of all people.

[19 : 27] What he is on the outside, we are on the inside. And I want to help you see that. That's why Jesus asks this question in verse 6, when Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he'd been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, do you want to get well?

That's a searching, penetrating question. And the man's response is revealing in verse 7. Sir, the invalid replied, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred.

And while I'm trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me. This guy is a faithless Jew. He's entirely without belief. He doesn't even mention God.

He expects nothing from God. In fact, he's at a pagan pool. He's at a superstitious shrine dedicated to the god Asclepius, this Greco-Roman god of medicine and healing.

And it's just not working for him. And what he says to Jesus is I basically have no friends. I have no one who cares for me. It's an every man for himself world and I'm completely ignored and all alone.

[20 : 31] And what you can kind of hear in this man's voice is that his identity over time has become wrapped up in his infirmity. And that he has become codependent with his brokenness.

And he now has a victim mentality. A blaming and complaining spirit where he's very good at pointing out all the wrongs of everybody around him.

And that's why Jesus asked him, do you want to get well? Jesus has a searching gaze that sees into the depths of our hearts past all of our defenses and into our real problems.

And that's why Jesus later on in verse 14 finds this guy after he's been healed and he says to him, see your well again, stop sinning. You're well again, stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.

Jesus knows this guy's heart. He knows that he's sick, not just with physical paralysis, but he's sick with sin. What theologians call homo incurvatus in se.

[21 : 41] He is a human being curved in upon himself. He centered his life on himself. Does that sound familiar to anybody? Jesus says, yes, you are a helpless victim of suffering and physical paralysis, but more than that, you're helpless because you're a responsible agent of sin that has created a spiritual paralysis in your soul.

38 years of a chronic crisis has made you a crotchety, curmudgeonly, unpleasant, despairing fellow.

Ouch. And we kind of know that because this guy gets healed and he doesn't even thank Jesus. He doesn't even bother to find out who Jesus is. Well, Jesus has insight into all the dimensions of the human heart.

And he says, this guy is an invalid who's a helpless sinner like all of us who needs to be saved by grace. And thank God that Jesus seeks us and finds us to give us that grace.

He singles out sin-sick people with no ability who are incurable, who are stuck, who are impotent, who are utterly helpless and hopeless, totally immobilized by our egocentricity, no capacity to struggle up to our feet spiritually on our own.

[23 : 14] And what does he do? He makes us free. He makes us walk. Look at the dramatic demonstration of inconceivable power.

This pitiful pagan pool has done nothing for this guy. But in a few simple words, what does Jesus say? Get up, pick up your mat, and walk. And at once, the man was cured and picked up his mat and he walked.

And this is what Jesus is getting at in verse 21 when he says, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to those he's pleased to give it.

It's what Jesus means when he says in verse 25, very truly I tell you a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

But, Jesus has only just begun to heal this guy. He has healed him in his body, but what about his soul? He's healed his physical paralysis, but Jesus wants to do a much more dramatic healing of his spiritual paralysis.

[24 : 25] Jesus has no prerequisite of faith and obedience to come and be healed by him. In fact, the guy doesn't come. Jesus goes to find him. But Jesus definitely requires faith and obedience as a grateful response to the healing.

And that's where I want to end our time this morning. Jesus makes shocking claims. He heals the helpless and then he shows us how to walk free. He makes shocking claims.

He heals the helpless, but he doesn't stop there. He shows us how to walk free. See, Jesus says, I'm able to raise you up to an entirely new existence, but this new life is not a freedom to go back to live like you were living before.

A doctrine of cheap grace snatches from God all the benefits of life and then presumes that I can just keep on living the way I determined to live my life.

But Jesus, what does he do in verse 14? He comes and finds him in the temple and he says to him, see, you are well again, stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.

[25 : 38] What a window into the terrible judgment of God. For what could possibly befall you that would be worse than being a paralyzed person lying on the ground for 38 years?

Jesus says, do not think that a lifetime of being an invalid is the worst thing that can happen to you. Something far worse than any sickness, however bad, something far worse than any disappointment, any loss of health or money or friends or deprivation can happen to you. What's the worst thing that can happen to you? It's to sin and not be forgiven. It's to perish spiritually forever.

And so Jesus gives this warning that's full of grace and truth. I've given you health. Now don't put that at risk. Put the sins of your past life behind you for your future life depends on it completely. What is the something worse that could happen to this man? This is where we encounter that unavoidable and awkward doctrine of Jesus about hell.

[26 : 56] I don't want to talk about it. And most preachers don't want to talk about it. But it's in all the four gospels and it's in all the writings of the people that Jesus chose and trained to represent him. And Jesus is getting at it right here in verse 28.

Do not be amazed at this for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out. Those who have done what is good will rise to live and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.

By myself I can do nothing. I judge only as I hear and my judgment is just. For I seek not to please myself but him who sent me. Now why does Jesus have to bring this up?

Is he trying to ruin our fun? Is he trying to manipulate us? Is he trying to scare us into being able to control us? Or is he giving us gracious truthful warnings?

When I look at Jesus' life and the way he treated people I see the most loving person who has ever walked planet earth. Jesus caused people who were rejected by the rest of the world like this paralytic guy to feel completely loved and accepted.

[28 : 12] And so I think the reason Jesus warns about hell more than any person in the whole Bible is because he loves us and he doesn't want us to go there.

He doesn't want us to experience it. And he knows that if we continue to ignore God and reject God throughout our lives then God is ultimately right.

He's what Jesus calls just to reject us. He knows that our sins will take us to a place of unimaginable and unending suffering.

That's why he says stop sinning. Stop sinning because you don't want to go there. And that's precisely why this gospel and all the gospels climax with the Son of God hanging on a cross. Because the Father has sent his Son all the way from heaven to earth to save us from this condemnation and this separation from God. Jesus hanging on the cross is in hell and he's experiencing and bearing the condemnation and the judgment that we deserve.

[29 : 25] And this is what he's getting at in verse 24. Very truly I tell you whoever hears my words and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged. On the basis of the judgment that I came to bear you will not be judged but you have crossed over from death to life.

And because Jesus moves us from death to life he relentlessly goes after the sin and death that's left inside of us. And that's why he comes to this guy and he says stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.

Jesus came not only to save us from the hell of condemnation but he came also to save us from that which leads us there and that's why he asked this question in verse 6 do you want to get well? That's a more uncomfortable and deeply disconcerting question than any of us realize. Do you want to be well? It's easy to say yes I want to be completely whole but do I even know what that means? Jesus is saying do you want a new life? Do you want to be a completely transformed person? Do you want for God to come and fully heal you and fully liberate you and fully deal with all the stuff he needs to deal with in you?

[30 : 59] Do you want God to come and deal with the refuse of your resentment and your bitterness? Do you want God to deal with the filth of your pride and your envy?

Do you really want God to deal with the stench of the sloth and the slander that characterizes your life? Jesus' question is deep.

Do you want me to deal with all the secret things that are hidden inside of you? all those treasured sins, all those cherished attachments that you can't imagine living without?

Do you really want me to get involved in your life? Do you really want me to come and be as determined to root out that which with equal determination of yours to be the center of everything? Do you want me to come in like that? do you want to commit yourself to a lifelong conflict with sin? [32 : 07] Do you want to get well? Honestly, I have to say, no, I do not. I don't want to do God's will.

I want to do my will. I am helpless. And I have to say that my only hope is God, you have to raise me up by the hand of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

I would love to want to be well, but I don't even know if I want to be well. Lord, if you want me to be well, make me want to be well. Lord, you must work in me both to will and to do your good pleasure. You must give me the desire and then you must give me the strength to carry it out. That's what Christianity is. A doctrine of cheap grace says, yeah, God, heal me and I'll just keep doing whatever I want.

But a doctrine of costly grace, here's the words of Jesus saying, if you want to come after me, you must deny yourself and you must take up your cross and come and follow me.

[33 : 29] Come, become like me in every way imaginable, in my mind and what I think, in my heart and what I desire, in my will and what I choose.

Come, learn, to live like the son with his father in total dependence, total surrender, total obedience, watching every move that the father makes and doing exactly what the father does.

Are you sure you want to be well? You sure you want to be like me? Wellness embodied?

Are you sure you want to walk free forever? That's the question, isn't it?

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.