

Jesus Can Really Heal

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[0 : 00] I don't know about you folks, but I get excited when we can sing a hymn that's almost 400 years old. I just think that's so wonderful. St. Francis of Assisi wrote that, you know, not the music, but the words.

And I sing it and I think, wow, it's just so great to be part of a church that just extends back in time and is ultimately founded by Jesus Christ, who isn't just a dead person, whose teaching we admire, but as the banner on the outside of our church says, Jesus is alive.

And we believe that he's present amongst us today and that we can know him personally. Today, we're going to be looking at what happens when Jesus meets a grumpy, dull, superstitious, backstabbing, ungrateful person.

So, we're going to see what happens when Jesus meets somebody like this. And, you know, it's one of the funny things about the Bible. I talked about this a little bit last week.

But in our culture, it's as if we're schizophrenic. Or no, I guess it wouldn't be schizophrenic. Well, we are schizophrenic. But we're sort of more like bipolar in our culture. And that it's as if, on one hand, the Bible is this toxic document that is filled with all types of evil things that oppress people.

[1 : 25] Or if we don't sort of think of it as being this toxic document, we think of it as being this pious document. And, you know, as if it's going to be more similar to a hallmark greeting card, very syrupy and filled with syrupy thoughts.

And it's because we're sort of locked in this bipolar type of mood that we can't sort of see that the Bible, the Gospels tell us, the Gospels say, you know what?

The Messiah of God, God's very Son, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, He walked amongst us. And He walked amongst grumpy people, angry people, arrogant people, poor people, rich people.

He walked amongst ordinary people like you and us. What happened? And the Gospels tell us what happened. And the Gospels constantly are inviting us to respond, even though, in a sense, we come to Jesus as a grumpy person or an arrogant person or a kind person or a religious person or a thoroughgoing, violence-loving person.

The Bible says these are the way these types of people come to Jesus. And Jesus' desire for you and me is that we come to Him and be changed. And that we come to Him.

[2 : 43] And no matter where we've come from, that we might know Jesus and know His healing power, know His saving power, and be changed. And so turn with me in your Bibles to page 922.

I, like Dave, I'm using a different version today, and I'll make that clear why I'm doing that in a few moments. And I specifically asked Dave to read the Gospel text using a version other than the Pew Bible.

And it's page 922. If you're using your Pew Bibles, most of the time you'll be able to follow along quite simply. I'm using the Today's New International Version, the TNIV, is what I'm using as I read. And we're going to read along. You should be able to follow. And the first place where you have a bit of a, you know, things just don't seem to match, I'll pause there and comment on why there seems to be a difference between my Bible and yours.

And here's how the story begins. 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 Bethesda, and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.

[3 : 56] Here a great number of disabled people used to lie, the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. Now just sort of pause there for a second with your Bibles. In your Pew Bibles, those of you who are using it, you'll notice that I didn't read the same words as you.

The first verse and the second verse, well, you know, they used different slight words, but it's obviously clearly the same. But all of a sudden, you're reading along, and you have a whole extra verse than I do, and you might be wondering a little bit about why that is.

And maybe it worries you a little bit. It should excite you that your version is a little bit different than mine. It should be, whoa, that's fantastic.

And here's why. One of the things about the Gospels, the New Testament, which is so amazing is this. There is no book that we hold in our, there is no ancient book that we can hold in our hands that has more ancient versions than the Bible.

That, you know, any old text, there can be questions about what the wording of that text is, but in the case of the New Testament, there are literally thousands and thousands of ancient manuscripts in many languages, in Latin and in Greek and in Coptic, in a variety of languages.

[5 : 11] And, in fact, you know, one of the things which is so cool, I can't remember if it's in Cambridge or Oxford, but there's a library in England, and they have part of John's Gospel. And by carbon dating and other methods, they're able to know that that piece of the document is from 110 A.D., like maybe 20 years after John first penned his Gospel.

We have a fragment that goes that far back. And lots of other ancient texts that we have, there's hundreds and hundreds of years gap, but because there are literally thousands of versions, old, old, centuries and centuries and centuries, these millennium, over-millennium-old versions of the Bible, there's a whole school of scientific study where the scholars can look at all of these different manuscripts and trace them back and trace them back and trace them back so that today, when we read the most modern version of the Bible, you can be 99.999% sure that what you're holding in your hand is a translation of what John wrote or what Matthew wrote or what Mark wrote or what Luke wrote.

And because of that, they're always getting this better and better and better and better. And so sometimes versions of the Bible, which maybe were translated 100 years ago or 500 years ago, their knowledge of what that original text that John wrote wasn't quite as complete.

They maybe only were 99% sure. We can be 99.9999% sure. And so what that means is that, you know, we can, you know, we shouldn't be afraid of scholarship or learning or the study of the Bible because when the Bible is studied, even scientifically and honestly, and when you look at archaeology, time after time after time, the New Testament is shown to be completely and utterly truthful.

That it really was something that John really was an eyewitness to what Jesus did. And he really did write, you know, it was John who wrote it. And we can trust that this is what John actually wrote.

[7 : 18] We can trust that. And the other thing which is so amazing about the Christian faith is this. You know, I said that there's some little differences in the text that maybe, you know, when the King James Version was written, it was only 98% sure that what they translated was actually what John wrote.

And today it's 100%. Well, what happened with that 2%? The thing which is so neat about the providence of God is that no doctrine was based on any of those parts that we got wrong.

Like, that's really cool. You know, it's not like, oh gosh, here I am believing in the divinity of Jesus and it shows that those are parts that John didn't write but were added by some half-crazed monk 400 years later.

Or, oh gosh, I was believing this and now I see that it wasn't. As scientists and as scholars get more and more accurate as to what John actually wrote, we see that no doctrine of the Christian faith was based on something that shouldn't be there.

And, you know, all you can say for that is praise God. I mean, we just have something which is so dependable and we don't have to be afraid of a scholarly study or examination because the word of God stands true.

[8 : 27] And so this little part that my version didn't have and that your version has, that's based on something that was probably added by some scribe 200 years or something after John wrote it.

And so the most modern versions of the Bible have just omitted it, maybe with a little bit of a note, but it's omitted it. So now that I've had this long aside on why you can trust the Bible, let's start reading the story again from verse 5.

So remember, he's here at number, verse 4, here a great number of disabled people used to lie, the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. One who was there had been there 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 the man, 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. Now just sort of pause there with your Bible for a second. I'm sort of cheating a little bit.

[9 : 28] You did hear the whole story when David read it just a few minutes ago. If you look at the whole story as a total, you realize that the man's not being polite.

And in fact, in the original text, in the original language, there's a curtness. He is, okay, it's an old word, dour. You know, I have university degrees.

Occasionally, I have to use an obscure word just to sort of, you know, justify the tens of thousands of dollars I blew in my education. And this guy is dour.

He is grumpy. He is short-tempered. His answer is as if, I'm not very, you know, he's acting as if, you know, I'm in sort of a bad mood and somebody who I don't think is very bright asks me an obvious question, like, are you standing in the pulpit?

And you go, yeah, I'm, yes, I'm standing in the pulpit. Like, I mean, it's, the man gives an answer as if, well, Jesus, like, I'm paralyzed and I can't get in the water because I don't have anybody to help me and if I had somebody to help me to get in the water, I mean, why do you think I'm here, Jesus?

[10 : 43] Of course I want to get well and I'm just hoping that maybe someday I'm here and nobody else shows up and I can crawl in by myself and finally get healed and the man is sort of impatient with Jesus and all the way through the story you see that this man, I mean, what's he like?

When the Jewish officials get a bit, get crossed with Jesus, with the man for doing something, the man doesn't say, well, listen here, guys, like, why are you so uptight?

Jesus healed me, you should be excited. And rather than having any type of backbone in defending Jesus, he says to the religious officials, hey, don't get mad at me, it's all his fault.

And the guy is, in a sense, so clueless that even though he's healed, he's so clueless and ungrateful that after Jesus heals him, he never even says to Jesus, by the way, like, who are you? So I can thank you, like, what's your name? So he never asks Jesus' name. When the people start to give the man a little bit of grief, he says, it's not my fault, he turns it all on Jesus and then later on, when he finally finds out what Jesus' name is, to curry favor with the officials, he seeks them out and tells them that it's Jesus so they can get mad at Jesus.

[11 : 56] He's not a nice guy. And you see, here's the very first thing that we have to understand. Everything about this miracle is it shows that Jesus takes the initiative.

And here's the wonderful news. I mean, the wonderful news is this, that nothing that we can do can stop Jesus being Jesus. That nothing can stop Jesus being kind.

Like, nothing. I can be grumpy, I can be angry, I can be undeserving. In fact, I am undeserving. I am undeserving. And Jesus doesn't relate to me in terms of how I deserve to be treated.

Jesus comes to me only with kindness. In fact, if you read through John's Gospel, John's Gospel wants us to understand that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

That Jesus is the Messiah promised for centuries by God himself. That he is the one who has come to deliver us. That he is the one who has come to deliver us when we cannot deliver ourselves.

[12 : 58] That he is the one who has come to bear our sins in his body that we might be able to be born from above. Born by the Holy Spirit. That Jesus is the one seeing our need, does not despise us or mock us or hate us or annihilate us, but he instead comes to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And that is not just something which is just some theological truth at the end of Jesus' life. It is all the way through Jesus. Jesus' DNA is kind. Jesus' DNA is merciful and loving.

And Jesus responds to no one according to how we deserve to be treated. He only responds to us with kindness. That is such a comforting thought, folks.

Nothing can stop Jesus from being kind. Even this grumpy, superstitious, backstabbing, ungrateful individual, Jesus is kind to him.

And folks, day by day, I need the kindness of Jesus. Let's continue on with the story. Verse 8.

[14 : 09] Then Jesus said to him, get up, pick up your mat, and walk. So even though the guy's been a dour, grumpy guy, Jesus doesn't say, well, I'm going to pass this guy by and pick somebody that I like a lot better.

He says, get up, pick up your mat, and walk. At once, the man was cured. He picked up his mat and walked. You know, friends, one of the things you see time after time after time in the Gospels is that Jesus can heal.

And this healing of Jesus is a deep healing. The text says that he's had this problem for 38 years. And so it's not something which is psychosomatic.

And it's something which involves not him just sort of vaguely getting better so he can crawl better. It means that he's healed enough that he can actually stand up and walk and carry his mat.

And it means just to be as outrageous as we possibly can because science helps us to know now how deep the healing is. If this is a real healing, it's a deep healing because it means that atrophied muscles have grown.

[15:13] It means that muscle memory which has been lost has been restored. It means that there's a whole range of nervous healing. I mean, healing of the nervous system, healing of the mind, healing of the muscles.

This is a deep healing. And, you know, the wonderful thing about science is that as we learn more and more and more science, it means that we have a choice when we read the Gospels.

We can either say, wow, or we can just sort of disbelieve it. I mean, science helps to increase the wow factor of reading the Gospels.

Wow, Jesus can really heal. Jesus can really heal. And all the way through the Gospels, you take healing out of the Gospels, you take healing out of Jesus' life, you have no Jesus left.

He's not, he's not just a teacher. So, verse 9, once the man was cured, he picked up his mat and walked. To the day on which this took place was a Sabbath. And so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, it is the Sabbath.

[16:20] The law forbids you to carry your mat. Now, by the way, friends, that's not true. The man hasn't broken a single Old Testament law.

You know what he's breaking? They've taken one of the Ten Commandments, you shall do no work on the Sabbath, and they've invented 39 categories of human action that describe that.

And the man is not, Jesus didn't tell the man to break the Ten Commandments, and the man is not breaking the Ten Commandments, the man is breaking human rules. And just as, I mean, we're a congregation that are trying to be biblically faithful, and this is, in a sense, a warning to us that, you know, we might sort of try to pride ourselves in looking down our noses.

Not that we do that, but there's always this temptation that we can sort of look down our noses at people who take away texts of the Bible and deny the Bible and despise the Bible, and we should never deny the Bible or despise the Bible or any of those things, but the Bible says just as much, in fact, maybe even more, about the human problem of adding to the Word of God and mistaking our thoughts and our rules for what God has actually said.

And so the text warns us the conflict which Jesus is having here is Jesus is not doing anything against the Old Testament law. He is doing something against religious rules.

[17:46] So verse 11, the man replied, the man, you see what he passes the buck, the man who made me well said, pick up your mat and walk. So they asked him, who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?

And friends, here's where we're going to end the text because remember I said that the text, the text, the whole gospel say, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world walked among us. God's Son walked among us. The Messiah of God walks among us. And the question really is not who is he but how do ordinary people like us relate to him?

And here we see the danger of a religious spirit. You know, one of the problems with religion, friends, is that religion can immunize us against God. That religion and a religious spirit can immunize us against God and what God is doing in our lives and wants to do in our lives.

So you think about it for a second. The men, these religious leaders, they meet this guy and they get mad at him first. They have a conversation, obviously more than just recorded here in the text.

[18:54] And as a result of this conversation, they find out that this guy has been healed after being ill, having some type of paralysis for 38 years. Okay, now, here's the choice.

They could have said, wow, that's fantastic. Praise God. Hallelujah. He healed you. You should be so fantastic. Do you have family you can tell?

Wow! Could have been their response. And their response is, he's breaking our rules. That's their response.

You see, the choice is there. Do we say, he's breaking our rules or do we say, wow! And religion can sometimes so harden us, bend us, deform us, make us like fossils, make us something that's like a mushroom dark and buried in the ground and make us in the midst of us thinking that we are so self-righteous and so spiritual, but all our religion is doing is hardening us and hardening us and hardening us from the action of God and so the choice before us is always this.

Do we hold on to our rules and our way or do we say to God, God, help my life to be one wow to your working, open to your working.

[20 : 21] Let's pray. Father, we acknowledge before you that it could have been our hands who put the crown of thorns upon Jesus' head, that it could have been our hands that nailed your son to the cross, that it could have been us who asked these anger-driven religious-spirited questions of your son.

Loving Father, we acknowledge before you that we are just as prone to a religious spirit, to adding to your word, to hardness of heart, to hatred and envy, to grumpiness and backstabbing, that Father, we are just as prone and live with just as much of this as the people who are talked about here in the gospel.

Father, we acknowledge before you that the people in the gospel are us. Father, may your Holy Spirit fall with fresh power upon us that we might trust in the kindness of your son, that we might trust in his healing power, that we might trust in his saving authority, that we might be delivered from hardness of heart, from a religious spirit, from vanity and pride.

Loving Father, we cannot do this by our own power. We cry out to you for mercy, that your Holy Spirit would deliver us from such great spiritual dangers, that our hearts would be softened to be turned towards your son, Jesus Christ, and may your word so penetrate our lives and your Holy Spirit so move and work within us, that everything that is about us might be one yes to you.

This we ask in the name of Jesus, your son, and our savior. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[22 : 22] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.