

Missing the Point

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[0 : 00] I wonder if you've ever seen someone completely miss the point. I remember one time Michelle spending a lot of time cooking this amazing meal and I said to the kids, isn't this great?

To which one replied, where's the tomato sauce? They totally missed the point about what my comment was supposed to elicit from them. Thanks for their mother. Well, back when I was teaching a grade 6 class, I put a maths multiplication question on the board like on the next slide. We were doing this kind of long multiplication and we just explained it to the children. I asked one of the kids to come up and have a go at solving the problem and this is what he wrote on the next slide.

Lots. All the kids thought it was hilarious. He missed the point and had to do it again. Well, today we're returning to John's Gospel, which we started last year.

And we're up to chapters 5 to 10, which are grouped by two very similar miracles. The healing of the lame man in chapter 5 and the healing of the blind man in chapter 9.

[1 : 04] There's miracles in between, but these two are particularly similar. And in between, sorry, are the miracles, but the theme throughout the whole section is really Jesus' identity and work.

Who is he and what has he come to do? So these chapters are a good way for us to start our church year. Because as a church, as Christians in fact, we need to remember who it is we are following and what it is he's on about.

So that we might be encouraged to keep following him and know what we ought to be on about, both as a church and as Christians. Now we'll see much more of his identity and work next week, but we do begin to see it a bit today.

Unfortunately, though, people just miss the point. And the first one to do so is the lame man who misses the point of Jesus' question. So we're at point 1 in your outline and verse 1 in your Bible. 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.

[2 : 17] 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.

So here the scene is set. And by the way, did you notice in verse 2 how many details John gives us about this place? It's a little indication that what we're reading here is actually history.

It actually happened. So much so that archaeologists are confident they've found this pool of Bethesda, which is actually a twin pool. And they've constructed a model of what they think it looked like today.

So on the next slide, you'll see that on the left is the temple. The Holy of Holies is just to the left. It's kind of cut out of the picture. Because on the far right side, you can see, hopefully, the pool of Bethesda with the red roof tiles.

On the next slide is a close-up. And you can see here how it's actually a twin pool, can't you? One slightly elevated over the other, so water could flow from one to the other.

[3 : 22] And the five colonnades are the red roofed areas. And so look at the four sides of the whole twin pool complex. And the fifth colonnade is the one that goes across the middle.

And these colonnades are held up by columns and under which the sick and disabled would lie during the heat of the day. But why would they come here?

Well, because they believed, there was a superstition at the time, that if you were the first person in the pool, you would be healed. You see, it seems these pools sat on some springs which bubbled up from time to time.

And they thought it was an angel stirring the water. And so if you were the first one into the pool, while it was bubbling, you would be healed. Now, we don't know how often the water bubbled or how real the healing was.

I mean, the first one in would have had to be the fastest, which meant only minor injuries. So perhaps the minerals in the spring did heal them. Either way, this man had been an invalid or a lame, unable to walk for 38 years.

[4 : 30] This is no sprained ankle, is it? This is a serious condition. In fact, scholars think that the average lifespan of men in those days was not much over 40.

Can you imagine that? So 38 years is basically a lifetime. And so here's this man who's got a lifetime in need, who is no doubt desperate to be made whole, which kind of makes Jesus' question in verse 6 seem rather silly.

Do you see verse 6? When Jesus saw him lying there and learned, or actually literally he and knew, supernatural knowledge, and knew that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, do you want to get well?

I mean, it seems like a silly question, isn't it? I mean, after 38 years, of course he wants to get well.

That's why he's at the pool. After 38 years, that's what he wants. I mean, asking that kind of question is like saying to someone who's been starving for food, would you like some food?

Of course they would. It's like asking my children, would you like to watch some TV? Of course they would. It seems like such a silly question, but Jesus doesn't ask silly questions, and so why does he ask this question?

[5 : 47] And I take it it's because Jesus wants this man to know that he is the one who can literally make his life whole. The word well in verse 6 is literally whole.

He wants the man to know that Jesus has come and he can make his life whole, so that the man might put his trust and hope in Jesus and not in the pool. You see, Jesus' question implies that he is someone who has power to heal.

I mean, you don't ask the question, would you like to be made whole, and then go, oh, well, good luck with that, see you later. Asking the question implies you're able to help, doesn't it?

I mean, when my girls were practicing for their dance concert last year, I asked them once, do you want to know how to do that dance better? And they laughed at me and go, yeah, right. And they were right to do so, because I've got no idea, I'm not a dancer.

But that's the point. By asking the question, it implies you are someone who can help. And so Jesus deliberately asks this question because he is someone who can help.

[6 : 50] And he wants the man to realize this. So the man might put his trust and hope in Jesus and not the pool. But instead of saying to Jesus, yes, please help me, the man misses the point of the question and says in verse 7, Sir, the invalid replied, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred.

While I'm trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me. Here the man misses the point, doesn't he? At first he says, I have no one to help me, which is sad, a sad indictment of his life that he has no one.

But it's also ironic because who does he have standing right next to him offering to help? Jesus.

He's missed the point. And second, he's still putting his hope in the pool rather than in Jesus.

He's still hoping to get into the pool first. And this is what people do today. They put their hope in all sorts of things to make their life whole and miss the point that it doesn't bring lasting contentment and joy.

Only Jesus can. And they say, if only I had this much money, my life would be perfect. My life would be whole. Or they say, if only I was healed of this disease, this illness, or if only I had this job or this house or this person in my life, I would be whole.

[8 : 12] Now these are all good things, but they don't bring lasting contentment and joy. Because after a while, they end up looking for something else. Including sometimes, you know, another spouse or another job and so on.

You see, only Jesus can give us true contentment and hope. Only Jesus can truly make our life whole. Not by giving us health and wealth, but by restoring our life spiritually with God as we were created to be.

You know, giving us forgiveness and peace and joy and assurance of heaven. and then restoring our life physically with God later in a new creation. And to prove that Jesus is the only one who can

do all this, to prove that he has the power to make life whole, he heals the man.

Verse 8, Then Jesus said to him, Get up, pick up your mat and walk. At once, the man was cured, he picked up his mat and walked.

See, Jesus healed this man with a word, didn't he? And in doing so, proves he is someone who is able to make life whole. Indeed, it proves he is the Christ, the Son of God, who has come to bring life to the full with God.

[9 : 29] That's what all these miracles point to. So on the next slide, do you remember John's purpose statement? On the next slide there. There it is, there it is, yep.

It says, just building suspense, we are. Now Jesus did many other miracles or signs in the presence of disciples which are not written in this book, but John says, these are written, I've written these things so that you may believe Jesus is the Christ, the King, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life, life with God, life eternal in his name.

That's what the miracle points to, who Jesus is and what he offers us. But it's not just the man who misses the point, the Jewish leaders miss the point too, which brings us to point two in your outline and verse nine in your Bibles.

At once, the man was cured, sorry, I read that, the second half 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 is the Sabbath, the law forbids you to carry your mat.

What? But he replied, the man who made me well, that man said to me, pick up your mat and walk. So they asked him, who is this fellow who told you to pick up your mat and walk?

[10 : 59] The man who had been healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. Now here we need to understand that while the Old Testament did say that Jews were not to work on the Sabbath, it was referring to their usual weekday work.

But the Jews made up extra laws themselves, which included things like not even carrying your mat from point A to point B. And the incredible thing here is that when the man who had been lame for 38 years tells them he's been made well, they totally miss it, don't they?

They don't ask, who healed you? What does this miracle mean? Instead they ask, who told you to break our Sabbath law? Not God's, it's their one at the moment. They're more worried that their extra Sabbath laws are kept rather than finding out what this miracle means.

It's kind of like going to hospital to visit someone who's been unable to walk for 38 years and as you're walking down the corridor, there they are, walking up to meet you. But instead of asking, how is this possible?

How did this happen? You say, don't you know it's socially unacceptable to walk around in just your hospital gown? People can see through the back of it, don't you know? It's to miss the point, isn't it?

[12 : 21] And to make this worse, these Jewish leaders should have known better. After all, they knew their Old Testaments off by heart. They would have known about our first reading from Isaiah 35, which is on the next slide, I think.

Here God promises he would come and save his people and bring them to a new creation and on that day, the eyes of the blind will be open, as we'll see in chapter 9, and the lame would leap like a deer.

That is, they'd be able to fully walk. And here is this miracle where a lame man is now, admittedly not leaping, but he's definitely walking, after 38 years.

They should have at least wondered whether God had arrived to save them in the person of his King, his Christ, to save his people and bring them to a new creation.

But they missed the point. And they even missed the point of the Sabbath too. The word Sabbath means rest, and while Israel was to rest from their usual weekday work, it wasn't simply to relax, it was also to remember God's rest after creation, which was all about enjoying life with his people in his perfect creation.

[13 : 36] You see, when the Sabbath law was first given, I think it's on the next slide, in the book of Exodus, it's based on the fact that God rested on the seventh day of creation. And when God rested from his work of creating the world, that was the only part he rested from, the work of creating, he started enjoying his world and his people like Adam and Eve, who started enjoying life together with God in his perfect creation.

In other words, God's rest represented life together with God in all its fullness. It's like when we hear the word holiday, we think about enjoying life with friends and family in some part of God's creation.

Well, the word rest was to remind Israel of God's rest, which is about enjoying life with God as family in his creation. And God's rest was meant to continue.

You might remember in Genesis, there was no eighth day, was there? The seventh day was meant to continue in the sense that life with his people was meant to continue until sin ruined it all.

And yet God's purpose for his people was still the same, to enjoy life with him, which is why when the Ten Commandments are given a second time on the next slide in the book of Deuteronomy, it's not based on creation, it's based on salvation.

[14 : 57] Because God saved them from Egypt in order to bring them to the promised land where they again could enjoy rest with God. life with God as his people in his place.

In fact, the promised land was sometimes called God's rest. Because it was all about enjoying life together with God as his people in his place. The point is, while Israel was to rest on the Sabbath from their weekday work, it was also to remember God's rest, which was all about life in all its wholeness, life with God, spiritually now and physically later in a new creation.

And that's why Jesus deliberately does this miracle on the Sabbath day. Do you notice that? I mean, he could have waited one more day to heal the man if he wanted to.

And the man, after being lame for 38 years, well, one more day would not have hurt. But Jesus deliberately goes to the poor on the Sabbath and heals the man.

Why? Well, to show that he is the one who has come to bring God's rest to people. To offer them life in all its wholeness.

[16 : 13] For by his death and resurrection he would bring forgiveness of sin so that we can enjoy a whole life spiritually with God now. He is our Father, we as his children. And then enjoy a whole life physically later in the new creation for eternity.

You can't get much more life than that, can you? And so by healing the man on the Sabbath he is saying he is the Christ, the Son of God who can save his people and bring them God's rest.

But the Jewish leaders, they miss the big point of the miracle on the Sabbath. They are so focused on their little extra laws. I remember our first wedding anniversary, Michelle wanted to do something special and so she took me to the beach for breakfast.

When we got there she pulled out the rug and the bowls and the spoons and put out some fruits, some strawberries, blueberries and watermelon I think it was. Got out some yogurt, some muesli and some apple juice.

And as she was unpacking the picnic basket I said somewhat ungratefully, where's the Whitbeaks? It's a testament to Michelle's grace that we saw another anniversary.

[17 : 20] But you see I missed the big point of the picnic that it was a celebration of life together because I was so focused on one little thing that I wanted.

And the Jewish leaders totally missed the big point of the miracle on the Sabbath because they were so focused on their little extra laws that they wanted. And so they miss who Jesus is and the life with God he offers and it's not just them sadly it's the man too for he now misses the point of Jesus' warning at point 3 verse 14.

Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him see you are well stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. It's not exactly the pastoral kind of words you'd hear from Jesus.

He's pretty blunt isn't he? But sometimes warnings need to be blunt don't they? and warnings are actually loving because Jesus doesn't want this man to suffer something worse than being lame for 38 years.

What could be worse than that? Well we might think of a lifetime of some other disease but in the end they're all terrible yet suffering for life eternal in hell under judgment well that's definitely worse isn't it?

[18 : 44] and that helps us to know how this man's been sinning and the man's sin has been to be siding with the Jewish authorities against Jesus instead of believing in Jesus and we get a glimpse of this back in verse 11 when the Jewish leaders tell him off for carrying his mat the man doesn't say oh hang on a second that man just made me walk after 38 years instead he literally said on the next slide actually it's some words missing in our translation for some reason he literally says the man who made me whole that man told me to do it.

You know he's passing the buck isn't he? He doesn't defend Jesus or point out the miracle to the Jews he gets scared and says it wasn't me it was that guy and Jesus knows this just like he knew supernaturally how long he'd been sick for and so he warns the man to think about his response to

Jesus but after being warned what does the man do?

Well verse 15 the man went away from Jesus and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who made him well. The man dobs on Jesus and John reminds us that it's the man whom Jesus made well.

How ungrateful is that? Instead of being thankful instead of believing Jesus he walks away from Jesus and sides with the Jews against Jesus.

And so he misses the point of the warning doesn't he? And to highlight this bad response John includes the miracle of the blind man in chapter 9 which is very similar yet with a very different response.

[20 : 26] On the back of your outlines there I've put the comparison so you can see how it fits together. Both are mentioned in Isaiah 35 the lame and the blind.

Both miracles are initiated by Jesus. Both involve a pool, the pool of Bethesda in chapter 5 or the pool of Siloam in chapter 9. Both are done on the Sabbath we're told.

Both the men are questioned by the Jews and both the men are later found by Jesus. Lots of similarities aren't there? But the response is completely different.

the lame man says nothing about his miracle in defense of Jesus to the Jews whereas the blind man keeps pointing out his miracle to the Jewish authorities so much so they get sick of him and kick him out.

The lame man in chapter 5 sides with the Jews against Jesus but the blind man in chapter 9 defends Jesus to the Jews and ends up believing in Jesus.

[21 : 25] And I think John deliberately has these two similar miracles not just to bookend these chapters but to highlight this man's negative response. How he's missed the point.

And so the application for us is how are we responding to Jesus? Have we missed the point of his miracle by not realizing who he is? The Christ. Come to bring God's rest, life in all its wholeness with God.

And have we missed the point of his warning by not taking seriously the alternative of life eternal which is death eternal. If you are here this morning and you don't yet believe in Jesus then don't miss the point of his miracle.

We have historical evidence for his miracles I should say too. And this miracle shows us who he is that the Christ or king who brings God's rest which is true life. And don't miss his warning that there is something worse than being lame for a lifetime.

time. And so don't keep siding with the world against Jesus. Instead do believe in Jesus. Put your trust in him and find life with God through him.

[22 : 38] And for us who already believe in Jesus and we too can sometimes miss the point of the miracle too can't we? You know that Jesus is the king, the Christ who ends up dying for us to bring us God's rest.

We can forget that he is our king by the way we live can't we? I remember vividly being at a Christian conference. I was 18 years old at the time because I just got my driver's license and I went out at lunchtime from the conference into town to get some lunch and I hooned down the street.

Broke the speed limit. Yep. And that was a long time ago. But I remember coming back to the conference and the reason I remember this incident vividly is because when I came back to the conference there was an announcement made to all, it was about 300 of us, all 300 of us and the announcement was we've been looking at about Jesus being our king and if he is our king we should act like it on the roads.

To this day I don't know if that announcement was because someone saw me. But you see the purpose of his miracle was to show who he is and we can sometimes miss the point by the way we live can't we?

And secondly we can also sometimes miss the point of the warning. If judgment for sin is worse than a lifetime of being lame which tells you how bad judgment for sin really is then which is better to be saved from?

[24 : 04] From judgment or for being lame? It's from judgment isn't it? And if it really is better then we do we value it as better. That is do we regard our salvation and life in Christ as something worth more to us than our wealth or even our health?

Is it something that we continue to give thanks for even when we don't have good health or not much wealth? Is it something that we want and pray for for our children and grandchildren even more than good grades and a good job?

Or have we missed the point of his warning? Let me finish with a story about a man from a friend's church. I don't know this man personally but I heard this story from my friend.

This man had cancer and was facing death and he wrote a letter to his teenage son. I don't remember how it started but I do remember it said this. He says, I know you are praying for me. Thank you. But if God decides not to give me healing then please remember he's given me something greater already. He's given his only son whose death for us means we have life eternal with him and that is worth much more than a cancer free body.

[25 : 19] I love you lots. Dad. He didn't miss the point of what was worth more did he? Let's pray. Let's pray.