

Missing the Point

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

To which one of them responded, where's the tomato sauce? They totally missed the point of my comment. I meant to say, yes, thanks mum. Or when I was teaching a grade 6 class back in my teaching days, I was teaching multiplication, the big multiplication.

I showed them what to do and I put on the next slide, I put a problem on the board like this one. On the next slide. There we are, just... It's alright.

We're building suspense. So I put it on the board like this, 256 times 23, asked someone out to work it out for us and then on the next slide he wrote... Lots.

All the kids thought it was hilarious but he missed the point and then he got the point when he had to do it again later. Well today we're returning to John's Gospel, as I said, which we began last year and we're looking at chapters 5 to 10, which will take us to Easter.

[1 : 08] These chapters are grouped at scenes by two very similar miracles. Chapter 5, today, a lame man is healed and then chapter 9, later, a blind man is healed.

There are other miracles in between and the theme that runs throughout this section is really Jesus' identity and work. Who he is and what he's come to do. And so I thought these chapters are a good way for us to start our new church year.

Because as a church, as Christians in fact, we need to remember who it is we follow and what he's on about in life. So that we might be encouraged to keep following him and know what we should be on about in life.

Now while we'll see much more of his identity and work next week, we do begin to see it this week. But unfortunately, people seem to miss the point.

And it begins with the lame man who misses the point of Jesus' question. So it's point 1 in your outline, verse 1 in your Bibles. If you have a look there, we read, At some time later, which is John's way of saying time has passed, perhaps a year or so, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals.

[2 : 22] 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. 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. Now here, by the way, just notice in verse 2 how John gives us all these details about this place.

It's a little indication that what we're reading here is history. So much so that archaeologists are confident they've found this pool, which was actually a twin pool, and they've come up with this model of what they think it probably looked like.

So on the next slide is, on the left-hand side is the Temple Mount, and it's out of the picture, but the Temple proper is just cut off on the left-hand side. And then to the right-hand side, you've got the Pool of Bethesda.

Now on the next slide is a close-up look at the pool, and you can see how it's a twin pool. One side is elevated to allow water to flow to the other side. And around the edges are these red-roofed colonnades.

[3 : 35] You've got the four, which is the four sides of the whole twin complex, and then the fifth one is the one that cuts across the middle. They're the roof tiles, and they were held up by these columns, and underneath them was shade where the sick would lie during the heat of the day.

But why would the sick come to this pool? Well, because they believed the pools would heal them. You see, it seemed that these pools sat on some springs that occasionally bubbled up, but there

was this superstition that it was actually an angel stirring the water when it bubbled. And so if you were the first person in the pool, you could be healed. Now we're not sure how often the water bubbled and how real this healing was.

After all, if you're the first person in, then you generally were the fastest, which meant your illness wasn't too serious. And perhaps the spring minerals would have granted some sort of healing. We don't know. But either way, this man had been lame for 38 years. And this is no sprained ankle. This is a serious condition.

[4 : 45] And given the average lifespan of men in those days, as scholars tell us, is about 40 years old, then 38 years is like a lifetime of being lame, isn't it?

And so here's this man who's got a lifetime in being in need, a man who is no doubt desperate to be made whole. And all that kind of makes Jesus's question in verse 6 seem rather silly. You see verse 6? 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? Or literally made whole? Jesus asked you, do you want to get literally made whole? After 38, isn't that a silly question to ask? I mean, why do you think he's at the pool? It's kind of like asking someone who's been starving, would you like some food? Of course they would. Or like asking my children, do you want to watch some TV? Of course they would. It just seems like such a silly question.

[5 : 48] But Jesus doesn't ask silly questions. So why does he ask this question? Well, because Jesus wants this man to know who he is. That he is the one who can truly make his life whole. Not the pool. And so he wants this man to then put his trust and hope in Jesus and not the pool. You see, Jesus' question implies that he is someone who has power to heal this man. And that's why you ask the questions, don't you? Because you know you can help. You don't say, do you want to be made whole? And then say, oh, well, good luck with that. See you later. Now, 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 because they knew I'm no dancer. I had no idea what I was talking about. But that's the point. By asking the question, it implies you are someone who can help. And Jesus deliberately asked this question because he is someone who can help. He wants the man to realize this, to put his trust and hope in Jesus rather than the pool. But instead of saying to Jesus, yes, please help me.

[6 : 58] The man misses the point of the question and says in verse seven. 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. Here, the man misses the point. At first, he says, I have no one to help me, which is a sad indication that he's all alone. But it's also ironic because who's standing right next to him offering to help? Jesus. But he's missed the point. And second, he's still putting his hope in the pool. He still thinks that's the solution to his problems rather than looking to Jesus for a solution. And this is what people do still today. They put their hope in all sorts of things to make their life whole. And they miss the point that those things will never bring lasting contentment or joy. Only Jesus can. They say, if only I had this much money, I would be happy.

[8 : 01] My life would be easy. My life would be made whole. Or if only I was healed of this disease or that illness, then everything would be better. My life would be perfect.

If only I had this car or this job or this person in my life, it would be whole. In fact, I saw an advert for that Married at First Sight, that TV show on at the moment. And I'm pretty sure that's what someone said. If only I had a person in my life, it would be whole. Now, those sorts of things, you know, jobs, people, and so on, they're good things, but they don't seem to bring lasting contentment and joy because as soon as we often have them, we're looking for something else, aren't we? That's what the people of the world are doing. Only Jesus can give us true contentment and hope. For only Jesus makes our life truly whole. Not by giving us health and wealth, but by restoring our relationship with God, because that's what we were created for. Restoring our life spiritually with God now, with forgiveness and peace and joy. And then restoring our life physically with God later, in a new creation, for eternity.

[9 : 15] And to prove Jesus is the one who can truly 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. Jesus healed this man with just a word, didn't he? And in so doing, he proves he is someone who is able to help, who is able to make life whole.

In fact, it proves he is the Christ, the King, the Son of God, who has come to bring life to the full with God. That's the point of his miracles. That's what John tells us at the end of his book.

Do you remember on the next slide, is John's purpose statement, why he's written and included these miracles. He says that Jesus did many other miracles or signs, in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

But these are written, like this one in chapter 5, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the King, the Son of God. And that by believing, you may have life in his name.

[10 : 22] But it's not just the man who misses the point. It's the Jewish leaders who miss the point too. So at point two in your outline, verse, the second half of verse nine in your Bibles. Here we read, 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 a 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 made you well? No, they didn't ask him that. Who is this fellow who told you to pick up your mat and walk? And the man who healed was healed, had no idea who it was for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

You see, they've missed the point, haven't they? Now we need to understand that while the Old Testament did say Jews were not to work on the Sabbath, it meant their usual every day or every weekday work.

But the Jews had made up these extra laws that 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's been laying for 38 years tells them that he's been made well or literally made whole, they miss it, don't they?

[11 : 38] They don't pick up on that. All they're worried about is who told you to carry a mat to break our Sabbath law. You see, they're more worried about their extra Sabbath laws than finding out what this amazing miracle means.

It would be like us going to the hospital to visit someone who'd been unable to walk for 38 years.

And as we're walking down the hospital corridor, there they are walking towards us.

But instead of saying, how has this happened? We say, don't you know it's socially unacceptable to walk around the hospital in your gown? Don't you know people can see through the back of it?

It's to miss the point, isn't it? And to make this worse, these Jewish leaders should have known better. After all, they knew their Old Testament off by heart. They would have known our first reading from Isaiah 35, which is on the slide, I think.

Here, God promised that he would come one day to 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 lamb would leap like a deer.

[12 : 44] That is, they'll be able to walk fully. And here is this miracle where this lame man is now, not leaping, admittedly, but he's certainly walking, isn't he? After 38 years, the Jewish leaders should have at least wondered whether God had arrived in the person of the Christ to save his people and bring them to a new creation.

But they missed the point of the miracle. In fact, they even missed the point of the Sabbath too. The word Sabbath means rest. And while Israel was to rest on the Sabbath, from their weekday work, it wasn't simply to relax.

It was ultimately to remember God's rest after his work of creating. You see, when the Sabbath law was first given, which is on the next slide, it was based on the fact that God created the world in six days and then rested on the seventh day.

And when God rested from his work of creating the world, he continues to work, which we'll see next week. But when he rested from creating the world, 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 think of the word holiday, we think about enjoying life with friends and family in some part of God's

creation.

[14:07] Well, the word rest was to remind Israel of God's rest, which was all about enjoying life with him as his family in his creation. And God's rest was meant to continue.

That's why in Genesis, there's no eighth day. The seventh day of God's rest was meant to go on, where people would enjoy life with God in his perfect world forever.

But of course, sin spoiled everything. And yet God's purpose for his people remains the same. And so, when the Sabbath law is given again on the next slide, this time in Deuteronomy, it's based on God saving them from Egypt.

Because he saved Israel from Egypt in order to bring them to the promised land, where they could enjoy God's rest, life with God together again. That was his purpose, always been his purpose.

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. And so 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 with him in all its wholeness.

[15:23] new spiritual life with him now, a new physical life with him later. And that's why Jesus deliberately does this miracle on the Sabbath.

I mean, he could have waited one more day, couldn't he? After all, the man had been lame for 38 years, and not to be harsh, but one more day would not have hurt him. But Jesus deliberately goes to the pool on the Sabbath and heals this lame man.

Why? Well, to show that he is the one who brings God's rest, life with him, to people. He is the one who by his death and resurrection would bring forgiveness of sins, so that people might enjoy life with God now spiritually, and life with God later physically, in a new creation for eternity.

You can't get much more wholeness of life than that, can you? You see, by healing the man on the Sabbath, he was saying he is the son of God, come to save his people and bring them God's rest. But the Jewish leaders, who should have known better, miss this big point of the miracle on the Sabbath. They're so focused instead on their little extra laws.

[16:36] I remember our first wedding anniversary. Michelle wanted to do something special, so she took me out for breakfast on the beach. Not bad.

When we got there, she put out the rug and the bowls and the spoon, unpacked some fresh fruit, strawberries, blueberries, I think some watermelon as well. She put out some yogurts, some muesli, some apple juice as well.

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

But you see, I missed the big point of the picnic because I was so focused on the 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 what they wanted, their little laws kept.

And so they miss who Jesus is and the God's rest that he offers. And sadly, so does the lame man. So at point three, and verse 14, where the lame man misses Jesus's warning.

[17:45] Here we read, later, Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, see, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may be happened to you.

Now, that's not exactly the kind of words we might expect from Jesus's mouth, are they? He's pretty blunt. But you see, sometimes warnings need to be blunt. And that's what this is, a warning.

See, Jesus loves him and doesn't want to see him suffer something worse than 38 years of not being able to walk. What, though, could be possibly worse than that?

We might think a lifetime of some other disease, but in the end, it's all terrible. Isn't it? But suffering for life eternal in hell, well, that's definitely worse, isn't it?

And that helps us to know how he's been sinning. You see, this man's sin has been to side with the Jewish authorities against Jesus instead of believing in Jesus.

[18:49] He seems to have been doing 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, this man's just done an amazing thing. I've been, you know, laying for 38 years, I can now walk.

Instead, he literally says on the next slide, there's a phrase missing which kind of emphasizes, he says, the man who made me whole, that man told me to do it. It's like he's passing the buck, it's not my fault, and forgetting about what Jesus has just done for him.

He doesn't defend Jesus or point out the miracle to the Jews, he simply gets scared and says, it wasn't me, it was him. And Jesus knows this. Back in verse 6 where it says that Jesus learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, it's literally Jesus knew he was in this condition, his supernatural knowledge, and Jesus also knew that this man was siding with the Jews and so he finds him in verse 14 and warns him about how to respond to himself.

But after being warned, how does this, what does this man do? Well, verse 15, the man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who made him well.

The man dobs on Jesus, that's what he does, and to underscore the ungratefulness of it, John makes sure we know that he was made well.

[20 : 18] You see, instead of being grateful and thankful, instead of believing in Jesus, he walks away from Jesus and sides with the Jews, doesn't he? And so he misses the point of Jesus' warning.

And we know this is a negative response because with that other similar miracle in chapter 9 of the blind man, it's very similar but the response is totally different, which shows us or highlights the contrast.

So on the back of your outlines, have a look there, there's a little table. Let me show you just very quickly what John's doing here. So in chapter 5, you've got the lame man and in chapter 9, you've got the blind man.

Both are mentioned in Isaiah 35. Both are initiated, both miracles are initiated by Jesus. Neither man has faith yet. They're initiated by Jesus. Both involve a pool.

Here, the pool of Bethsaida, in chapter 9, the pool of Siloam. Both miracles are done on the Sabbath. Both men are questioned by the Jews afterwards and both men are later found by Jesus.

[21 : 21] It's a lot of similarities, isn't it? But the responses are completely different. In verse 11 of our chapter, the lame man says nothing about his miracle and just blames Jesus. He told me to do it.

Whereas in chapter 9, the blind man keeps pointing out his miracle and says, well, Jesus must be from God. Here in chapter 5, the man in verse 15 ends up siding with the Jews against Jesus.

He dobs on Jesus. But later in chapter 9, the blind man defends Jesus to the Jews and ends up believing in him, we're told. And so we know this response here is wrong.

And so the application for us today then is how are we responding? Have we missed the point of his miracle by not realizing who he is and the life he offers? And have we missed the point of his warning by not taking seriously how bad judgment is?

I mean, suffering any illness for 38 years is worse than I can possibly imagine. And yet judgment is far worse, says Jesus. If you are here this morning and you don't yet believe in Jesus, then don't miss the point of his miracle, which we have evidence for by the way, these miracles.

[22 : 36] This miracle shows us who he is. He is the Christ or King come to bring God's rest which is true life, life eternal. And don't miss his warning that there is something worse than being lame for a lifetime which is death eternal.

So don't keep siding with the world against Jesus. Instead, do please put your trust in Jesus and find life with God now and later. And for us who already believe in Jesus, then we can sometimes miss the point of his miracle too.

That he is the King or Christ who died for us to bring us God's rest. We can sometimes forget he is our King and live our way instead. I remember vividly being at a Christian conference.

I was 18 years old at the time because I had just got my license and we had been talking about Jesus being the King of our lives and so on. And at lunchtime I left the conference to go into town and get some lunch.

And I just got my license and so I hooned. I broke the speed limit dramatically. Hooned into town and I remember this vividly because when we got back to the conference there was this general announcement made to everyone, a few hundred people there, and the announcement was, we've been talking about Jesus being our King, it'd be great if we could live it out on the roads too.

[23 : 56] Now to this day I don't know if that was because of me. But you see the purpose of his miracle was to show who he is and we can miss the point by the way we live, can't we?

We can forget he's our King who saved us by ignoring him in our lives. And second, we can also miss the point of his warning. If judgment for sin is worse than a lifetime of being lame, which must be ridiculously bad, then which is better to be saved from?

From judgment or from being lame? Judgment is clearly worse, says Jesus. And if it is really better to be saved from judgment than a physical illness or disability, then do we value it like that? Do we value our salvation, our life in Christ, even more than being healed from a physical injury? In other words, is our life and salvation in Christ worth more to us than even our wealth or even our health?

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

[25 : 22] 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. My friend told me about him. He had cancer and was facing death and so he wrote a letter to his teenage son.

I don't remember how the letter started but I do remember he said, I know you are praying for me, son, thank you, but if God decides not to give me healing, please remember that he's given me something much greater already.

He's given me 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. I love you lots and lots.

Dad, he didn't miss the point, did he? He got how worthwhile his salvation in Christ was and so he continued to thank God even though he wasn't healed.

Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for this reminder of who Jesus is, that he is our saviour king who brings your rest to us.

[26 : 29] That is life with you now spiritually and the guarantee of life with you later physically in the new creation. So father, we pray that you'd help us to live with him as our king this week and beyond and help us not to miss the point of how great a salvation we've been given in him.

We pray all these things in Jesus name. Amen.