

Pool Clue

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, these are very big things that we've just read and our minds are easily distracted and our hearts are weak.

And so we pray that you would strengthen us to hear your word, to trust you and to see Jesus in the way that he reveals himself and so enjoy eternal life.

We ask this in his name. Amen. Can I ask someone at the back to close the back doors please?

That would be great. Keep a bit of the traffic noise out. Thank you very much.

I'm not going to close all the doors. That's when we do evangelistic sermons. That's a completely different thing. Now if you would take your Bibles and turn to John 5, the marathon passage we just read.

And as you do, I have at the front here the Tower of Terror. And there's a photograph of me on the inside.

[1 : 07] This is me here. This is to prove that I went on the Tower of Terror. Excuse me? No, I'm not going to pass it around.

I'll tell you why I'm not going to pass it around because it says here classified information. Speed up to 160 kilometres per hour. Height 38 storeys.

Three football field lengths along the ground. Zero to top speed in seven seconds. 6.5 seconds of weightlessness.

For me it's a lot. G force on the body. 4.5 G's. We've just returned from Australia and my son and I went on this ride very stupidly.

Actually, he's an 18 year old and he's away tonight so I can talk about him. We had two friends, he had two friends with them and they had their father.

[2 : 12] And I said, I'm not going to go on that thing. I said to myself, I'm not going to go on that thing. And his friend's father said, I'm going to go on that thing. And I said, yes, I'm going to go on that thing. So, you have to take off all glasses, jewellery, watch, belt.

You can't have anything in your pockets. This is the fastest, highest, greatest G force roller coaster when it was built a couple of years ago in the world. Four and a half.

Did I mention four and a half G force? You shot out of this thing. You're in a little carriage-y thing and you shot out along a track at 160 kilometres per hour.

And you leave most of yourself back there. And you run along and then you hit a 90 degree angle like this. And the track goes straight up a tower to 38 stories high.

Thirty-eight stories. And you're just free and you go straight up and then you stop at the top. And then you fall back down.

[3 : 18] And at the top I looked over at this other father and I thought, I hate you. I'm never going to do something like this again. Why am I telling you?

It was great though. It was really great. It was a fantastic thing. I'm 50 and I'll never do anything like that again. Now the reason I'm telling you this is because as the passage was read for us, this passage, John 5, is very much like a roller coaster.

In fact, after the Tower of Terror, we all went onto another roller coaster, like a normal roller coaster. You know, round and round and round. It was easy. This passage, this passage is like, what's the opposite of terror?

It's like, it's a good roller coaster. In fact, if I would name it, I would call it Big Life. It goes up and down and spins around.

And I want you to follow me through this miracle. This is a sign in John's Gospel and follow it with me. Look down at verse 5. We begin very low. Jesus comes into Jerusalem.

[4 : 26] He goes to the pool of Bethsaida. In verse 5, he finds a bloke who's been paralysed for 38 years. He's been lying by this filthy pool for 38 years.

Look at verse 3. He's surrounded by a huge crowd of people who are blind, lame, literally incapacitated and withered, the Greek word means.

It's an awful, it's a distressing picture. This is a very sad, very sick, very needy group. And if you ever travel in the third world, you'll see this.

And what makes it worse is in verse 1, there's a great big party going on in Jerusalem. Feast the Jews. Everyone's eating lamb barbecue. And there's this great crowd of sick, sorry people. And what makes it even worse is that the crowd are bound together, not just by their tragic circumstances, by a cruel superstition. You know, if you go to Jerusalem today, you can go to St Anne's and you can visit the pool of Bethsaida.

[5 : 38] They've excavated it recently. Five great big porticos. And the local legend was, because it's fed by an underground spring, the local legend is that when the water is stirred up, somehow it's an invisible angel dipping his toe in the water and that the first person to jump in is going to get healed.

Now, can you imagine the fight, the brawl that breaks out when the water starts up? Blind, lame, paralysed.

Just awful. Because superstition always leads to cruelty. Imagine the race to get in the water. You know, think about it.

Why would the angel only heal the first person in? It's a stupid superstition. But this was where these people were pinning their hopes. And the race to get in the water would have been like the Tour de France.

I mention that because an Australian came second. So here is a group of people who are very needy.

[6 : 43] And there are no hospitals. Hospitals were created by people who followed Jesus later on. No physiotherapy. No public healthcare system.

No social net. What happens? Verse 6. Jesus saw him. Verse 6. Knew he'd been lying there a long time. And he said to him. What does Jesus say to him?

Do you want to be healed? Verse 7. The sick man says, Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is troubled. While I'm going down, another steps in before me.

Don't you think that's a strange question for Jesus to ask? I mean, isn't it obvious that he needs to be healed? It is.

And in the Greek, it's a little bit different. Jesus says, do you want to be created whole? Now, why does Jesus ask him this question? I think because he wants this man to articulate his need.

[7 : 44] He wants to expose the false hope that he's got. And the man bites on it. He says, look, my real problem here is speed.

Every time the water stirs up, someone gets in before me. I need someone who's going to stand beside me and push me in. And Jesus just dismisses his answer.

And in verse 9, sorry, verse 8, Jesus makes three quick commands. He says, rise, take up your mat and walk. And verse 9, at once, immediately, he was healed permanently.

And he took up his mat, his pallet and walked. Astounding. Or in the Greek, it says, he was made whole. He was created whole. It is a creation miracle with just a word.

Jesus puts muscles where there were no muscles before. For 38 years, he's laying there by the pool. Doesn't need any help to get up and walk. Bang, gets up.

[8 : 48] And the rise word is a very important word, as we're going to see in just a minute. With just a command, he is physically created afresh. Now, you're making a movie of this passage.

Good place to stop, don't you think? Happy ending. He jumps up, goes back to join his family, has a productive life. Makes a positive contribution. One of the things about a roller coaster is you can't get off at halfway.

When I was at the top, it occurred to me, I'd like to get off here. It's another wretched thing of sailing as well. If you're sailing and you get into trouble, you just can't get off. Whereas you play rugby, you can get off at any time.

Well, these stories in John's Gospel, there's more to the story. And we haven't really come to the real issue yet. Look down then at, well, look down at verse 16.

The miracle that Jesus performs earns him terrible persecution. The Jews, by which John means the Jewish leaders, well, let's go back to verse 10.

[9 : 58] Verse 10, they see the man who's been paralysed for 38 years and he's carrying his mat and it just happens to be a Sabbath, which is against one of their rules, and so they jump all over him.

What are you doing carrying your mat on the Sabbath? And he says, the only reason I am upright and not lying there next to that disgusting pool is because I've got new legs.

Did you notice? He says to the Pharisees, some guy came up to me and commanded me to rise and commanded me to take up my mat and commanded me to walk and look, I can do it.

And they say, who told you to pick up your mat on the Sabbath? You see verse 12? Who was the man who said, who dares defy our rules? Which of course is the right question for the wrong reason.

And very amazingly, I think, in verse 13, the man who'd been healed didn't even know who it was who'd healed him. But Jesus is not finished.

[11 : 07] In verse 14, we read this very stunning verse. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, see, you have been created well, created whole.

Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you. What on earth is Jesus talking about?

Don't you think that's a strange thing for Jesus to say? He's just healed this guy from 38 years of at least lameness. And then he says to him, I've created you whole, don't sin anymore, turn away from a life of sin or something worse will befall you.

You know, if you read through John's Gospel, it's very clear that Jesus cuts the tie between disease and sin.

Later on in John chapter 9, his disciples ask him about the man born blind. And Jesus says, no, no, no, it doesn't work that way. You don't suddenly come down with disease because you are particularly sinful.

[12 : 17] No, Jesus is doing something else. But here's the question, what possibly could be worse than 38 years of paralysis, of 38 years of physical suffering and lying beside the pool?

Well, after the man finds out who Jesus is, he reports him to the Pharisees. And in verse 17 we read, Jesus answered the authorities, my father is working still and I am working.

And this was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him because he not only broke the Sabbath but he called God his own father making himself equal with God.

Very bad way to get out of trouble. The Jews are incensed that Jesus has done this healing on the Sabbath and they go to him and they start to persecute him and he says, well, God, the creator, God, my father works on the Sabbath.

Why shouldn't I work on the Sabbath? And I want you to see, just before we look at the significance of this, that every single action Jesus takes in this story is deliberate.

[13 : 31] He goes up to Jerusalem. He chooses to go to the pool. He goes to the man. He speaks to the man. He heals the man. He chooses to do it on a Sabbath. Why doesn't Jesus wait till Tuesday to heal this guy or a Thursday at least?

Because there's something else going on. What's going on here? I remind you that in John's Gospel, the miracles are called signs. And the focus of the miracles is not so much the miracle itself but what the miracle points to.

In fact, here are the most remarkable miracles that the world has ever seen. When we get to chapter 11, we'll see Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. And do you know how much description is given to the raising of Lazarus from the dead?

It's just one little line. The focus isn't really on the power of the miracle. Even though that's wonderful and astounding, the focus is somewhere else. And this miracle is a sign that points in two directions.

You know those signposts on the equator that point in two directions? Johannesburg, 10,000 miles. London, 10,000 miles. Has anyone ever been to the equator?

[14 : 45] I have a friend who's crossed the equator something like 10,000 times. You believe me? He lives on one side of the equator and he teaches at a school on the other side.

And he walks across the compound six times a day. That's how he does it. So here is... This miracle points in two very different directions.

One is a warning to us and the other is a wonderful encouragement to us. So let's look at the warning first. And I've called this sign Big Death. Big Death. It is sin which leads to eternal death. Now, think back to those most shocking words where Jesus comes to this man in the temple and he says, See, I've created you whole.

Sin no more that nothing worse before you. The question is, what is it that is worse than 38 years of human misery?

[15:44] And the answer is, an eternity separated from God. And what is it that has the power to separate us from God eternally?

In Jesus' mind, the answer is sin. It's a lovely thing that Jesus is doing, you see. He doesn't just care for this man's physical needs.

He cares for him as a whole person. Yes, his body is very important. Jesus is very interested in our bodies. But Jesus is warning him and warning us that there is something far more devastating, there's something in his mind far worse than 38 years of destitution.

And it is sin. Anything contrary to God's will, anything contrary to his word. And I wonder if you think that. Sin is worse than paralysis.

Because unless we turn from sin, sin has the capacity to separate us from God forever, which is far worse than any human capacity for 38 years, for 38,000 years, for 38 million years, you see.

[16:58] Jesus is not playing down the importance of the physical healing. What he's done is wonderful. But he's playing up the importance of dealing with this reality of sin and receiving from Jesus the gift of life.

It's a great warning to us, brothers and sisters. Jesus is saying you cannot measure success and failure in terms of this life. You can only really measure it in terms of eternity.

And failure is not having your sins dealt with by Jesus. And success ultimately is having your sins dealt with by him. It's interesting, you know, when Jesus comes to this guy and says to him, sin no more, in the original it means that sin had been the major preoccupation of his life before that.

He was happy with sin. Sin, he didn't think about it very much. And Jesus says to him, I want you to break off from that way of life. And I want you to enter into a new way of life.

And the key mark of the new way of life is you have a different attitude to sin. That's what it is to be a Christian. And it's an act of great kindness on Jesus' behalf.

[18:16] This is very challenging, isn't it? Jesus wants us to take the eternal perspective, which is why it is such utter foolishness to live for the moment, just live for today.

The philosophy that's being pushed on us in so many media outlets is just utter foolishness when we realise the truth of what Jesus says here. And I recognise how shocking this is to Canadian ears and to West Coast ears and to Vancouver ears.

We live in a culture where we don't talk about sin. Sin is the kind of thing you see on dessert menus. It's not... It's a joke. Sin implies there's a God to whom I'm accountable.

I don't want to be accountable to anyone. And so if you talk... If you seriously talk about sin in a conversation, try it sometime. It's a bit of a conversation stopper. Someone is bound to turn to you and say, that's just inappropriate.

That's the... It used to be offensive. Now it's inappropriate. And I think, as Jesus followers, we cannot help being affected by our culture. And I think the measure of how deeply we have been blinded by our culture is how uncomfortable we are talking about this thing, sin.

[19:37] You can't grow in godliness as a disciple of Jesus Christ. You can't be a useful Christian without increasingly seeing sin from an eternal perspective. And as you grow older as a Christian and as you grow deeper as a Christian, it ought to horrify us.

We ought to see sin as the worst tragedy in the world. It's worse than death, you see, because it can separate us from God forever.

So that's the warning sign. It's pretty stern, isn't it? Sin leads to eternal death. But there is... The bigger part of the sign is what I've called big life.

And if it's sin that leads to eternal death, it's the Son, Jesus, who brings us eternal life. And I want to spend a couple of minutes on this as we finish. Did you notice, in verse 8, when Jesus went to the man and said to him, Rise, the first command he gives him, that is the New Testament word for resurrection.

It's a power of God word. And the miracle of him getting up and being created whole points to the power of Jesus Christ to give life.

[20 : 56] Let's just trace this thread through some of the verses. Turn over to verse 21 for just a moment. Listen to these words of Jesus.

As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whoever he will. If you've read the Old Testament, you'll know that a number of times God raises people from the dead.

And Jesus is saying, God does it, I do it. I have that authority. I have that ability myself. Incidentally, just a little bit off the topic, if you look at verse 23, Jesus says that all, well let me start at 22, the Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honour the Son even as they honour the Father.

He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him. You cannot say you worship the true God unless you venerate Jesus. Jesus is saying, the only way to truly worship the true God, the Father in heaven, is to worship Christ.

Now if there's any doubt about Jesus' power to give life, look down to verse 26 for a moment. As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

[22 : 25] This is, we don't have life in ourselves. We depend on him. When God created Adam, the text says, he breathed life into his nostrils and the man, Adam, became a living being.

Jesus is saying, that life I have in myself and I have come to give that life and to connect it to the great life, the life of eternity, the life of God, which is what we call eternal life.

It's what Jesus calls eternal life. This is why Jesus came. He didn't come just to do a couple of miracles. He came into this world to bring the life of heaven to us or to bring us into the life of heaven, eternal life.

We're still on the roller coaster and I think we come to the highest point in verse 28 and 29. Do not marvel at this, says Jesus, for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice. He's speaking about himself. And come forth, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. Don't you think that's an amazing thing to say?

[23 : 44] Jesus is saying that on the judgment day, it's his voice that's going to call every living, every human being that's ever died back into life again. The same voice that said to the paralyzed man, rise, get up.

The same voice that said to him, sin no more, lest something worse befall you. The same voice that promises us eternal life. Every single one, every man, woman and child who has ever died in the history of this world will be raised by that voice and will stand before Jesus and Jesus is the one who determines their destiny.

All the nice people, all the nasty people, all the horrors of history, all the heroes of history. Every religious teacher, I say this reverently, Buddha will be raised by Jesus and will face Jesus in judgment.

Muhammad, Krishna, every single person who's ever lived and Jesus will decide who belongs to him and who does not. When you die, when I die, you know the first voice we are going to hear?

It is the voice of Jesus Christ raising us either to the resurrection of life or to the resurrection of judgment and he will raise us and he will either say, welcome child, well done good and faithful servant, come in or he will say, depart from me, I never knew you.

[25 : 13] That's what the sign points to. It's Jesus who controls our future. It's Jesus' opinion that's the one that really counts. And Jesus brings this home, I think, in verse 24.

This is a kind of application that Jesus himself makes and I just want to finish with this verse. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears or she who hears my word and believes him who sent me, God the Father, has eternal life, present tense.

He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life. Jesus is promising to do for us what he did for the man at the pool.

He says, I will raise you to life, not just in the final day. You don't have to wait until the final day. He will do it now in the now.

Tell you, brothers and sisters, I think this is one of the most magnificent things about the Christian gospel that Jesus has come into the world and he has told us what will the verdict be on the last day.

[26 : 25] He's come to us and he's told us that if we trust in the Father and if we believe that Jesus has come from the Father, we can know now what he will say to us on that day.

I think that's very good news. He's saying that he will give us the life of God now, eternal life. He's the one to whom all judgment has been given and he says, he says, you will not come into judgment.

You have passed from death to life. So here is a magnificent miracle and a wonderful sign and it points out to us that sin will lead to eternal death but it is the Son who comes and brings us eternal life and how do we receive it?

What does Jesus say in verse 24? By hearing his words and believing the God that God sent him. This is why Jesus came. This is why he died in our place.

We're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper in just a moment. The heart of the Lord's Supper is Jesus Christ giving his life for us and to us so that we might receive the gift of life.

[27 : 38] And he's come, you see, so that we won't live nervously or anxiously but so that we can live confidently looking forward to that day, to something better not something worse.

It's very stark, isn't it? Here are two kinds of life. One is marked by happiness with sin and the other is marked by a simple faith that God sent Jesus Christ.

It's a great assurance. And I want to say to each of you tonight, I don't know if you're someone who doubts, I don't know if you're someone who's confident in Jesus Christ. If you listen to Jesus' teaching and if you believe in your heart, if you know in your heart, yes, he comes from God, verse 24 says, you have passed from death to life.

It's great, great news. This is the way he raises us to life. This is the way he saves us from the eternal consequences of sin. All we need to do is listen to his words, listen to his words and to know in our hearts that he came from God.

And that's the end of the roller coaster. And let me just read you that verse again, verse 24. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.

[29 : 01] He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.