

Waiting For The Big Break

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[0 : 00] Well, the talk today from John chapter 5 verses 1 to 8 is entitled, Waiting for the Big Break.

There was an article, an editorial in the back page of the front section of the Globe and Mail this morning, which talked about the mentality of waiting for the big break.

A lot of people, I guess, in the course of our lives spend most of our time waiting for the big break, living in anticipation of it or else living in the quiet despair that it never happened and you're a bit angry that it never happened.

And so I want you to think about that as we look at this passage about the man who for 38 years waited for the big break that was going to change the direction of his life.

The article in the Globe and Mail talked about what I call the lottery mentality.

[1 : 10] You keep buying tickets, you keep being disappointed week after week after week. The thing that you paid good money for, you look, you crumble it in your hand and you throw it away and it's useless.

Next week, brand new expectations. There it is. It might very well be the winner and the news comes out.

That's it. Another disappointment. And that is, in a sense, a kind of lifestyle. The article in the Globe and Mail was that a lot of people who are living on welfare in Ontario, somebody has just decided, are using their welfare money to buy lottery tickets while they go to the food bank to provide groceries.

That was treated somewhat cynically in the Globe and Mail that that doesn't really happen. They are on the grounds that how come 40,000 people more went to the food bank this month than last month.

That suggested that there wasn't 40,000 people who were caught up in the lottery syndrome, waiting for the big break to happen. The story, which is the story of a man who lay by the pool of Bethesda, not that he laid there for 38 years, but he had been ill for 38 years.

[2 : 34] And the only hope he had, the only big break that he could expect, was that by some miraculous intervention, he would be there and he would be the one that was healed when the waters were stirred by an angel of God at an unknown time, that he would be into it first and he would be healed.

And he went on with that for 38 years. The first thing that I'd like you to know about this is that if you put, this is sin, you see.

What the story is about, the sort of background of this story, is that you've got to get to understand what sin is.

Sin is illustrated for you in a very graphic way. Sin, in the first instance, it tells you, is paralyzing. You can't do anything.

Now, whether that is physically paralyzing or mentally paralyzing or emotionally paralyzing or spiritually paralyzing, that's what sin does for you.

[3 : 51] Sin is characterized by endless waiting for something that never happens. You go on and on and on waiting in your condition of paralysis.

It tends to atrophy us emotionally and spiritually so we can't do anything. You know, so that even if the opportunity is there to grasp, our hands have been held out so long that they will no longer close on the opportunity because they are atrophied with waiting.

And that's characteristic of sin, too. One of the most deadly impacts of sin is that it strongly hinders us in seeking a cure.

In other words, we come to terms with it so that we no longer look for any antidote to it. We accept it. We accept it. And that becomes another form of our atrophying, our paralysis, is that we cannot

consider the possibility that sin could change.

Our brave new world, as you read about it, the world we live in now, is a world that has decided that rather than fight it, let's accommodate it.

[5 : 27] Let's accommodate all the things that are the result of sin in our world so that we're no longer trying to fight it. We just accept it as that's the way things are and we'll try and deal with it.

Now, I don't want to go into the details about that, but I would like you to go into the details in your own mind about how our society seeks to do it.

I mean, it could be used, sex education in the schools. There is no longer any point in teaching any kind of sexual morality.

It's going to happen, so let's face the fact that it's going to happen and do the best we can with it.

Now, that's what I call accommodating sin. The paralyzing, atrofying, hopeless despair of sin is enshrined in our society as something that we can bravely deal with.

And that's not what it's meant to do because that is one of the impacts of sin is to make us think that there is no other alternative except to give into it.

[6 : 32] And so that was the condition of this man. This thing called sin happens to people. It happens to companies. It happens to countries.

The terrible weight of sin in this land of this dominion of Canada has almost paralyzed us with inactivity.

We simply don't know where to turn. We don't know what to do. We don't know how you can reconcile irreconcilables that seem to exist.

We are in a sense of despair about our country. And the breakdown of our country will not be the great emancipation of people who are under bondage.

It will be a great triumph of the despair which sin brings to a country when the country is loaded with apathy and indifference and paralyzed into inaction.

[7 : 29] That's what sin does. That's how it works on people. The ultimate sin is despair. You can't do anything with it.

Hope you can do something with even if it's such a tiny hope. You can build on it. But despair destroys and destroys and destroys and doesn't accomplish anything.

And when you're in a condition of despair, you are in the condition of this man waiting for 38 years. Sin is characterized by the victim mentality.

So that when Christ turns to the man and says, you want to be healed, I've got nobody to help me. So what I want doesn't matter anymore because nothing can happen to change.

And that was the mentality of the man. Scripture says that fools make a mock of sin.

[8 : 37] And what we need to do is to take sin extremely seriously. Not to mock it. Not to make fun of it.

But to learn to hate it with a violent hatred. Accommodating it is of the nature of sin.

To accommodate it. And so we tend to make fun of it. We tend to mock it. We tend to pretend it's not very important. But it's robbing the heart and soul of people.

It's leaving them in a condition of despair. And I don't want to get political about this.

But if you are taught as a people despair and hopelessness and fatalism, as those are the conditions of life, then terrible things can happen.

[9 : 43] People just shrug their shoulders and say, that's all you can do. Well, I tell you this because I really think that you don't understand this story that we've got in front of us unless you understand the reality of sin.

And that it was the reality of sin, not this man's sin particularly, but the fact of sin that demonstrated itself in the life of sin that was not the truth is that he was who for 38 years was trapped in this situation.

Well, look at it a little more closely. He was hopeless. He had nobody to help him. He was incapable of taking initiative.

He was convinced of the impossibility of his own situation. And he was avoided because of his situation. Everybody else had given up on him too.

That was the situation that he was in. Nobody had any hope for him. So nobody was prepared to deal with him. Nobody was prepared to help him. Nobody was prepared to take any thought for his situation.

[10:56] That was the position he was in. The big break came for him when Jesus comes along and Jesus takes the initiative. Notice, when Jesus saw him, he knew that he'd been lying there a long time and he said to him, Do you want to be healed?

That's a terribly important question. Because it's the kind of question that all of us, in a sense, need to face in our daily morning quiet time.

Do you want to be healed? Do you want anything to happen that's different than what you've got right now? Do you have any hope? Do you see any light?

Do you want to be healed? And it's terribly important how each of us as individuals might come to terms with that question which the man was confronted with by Jesus.

And of course, he recited his despair. His despair was focused on a kind...

[12:16] I don't know how seriously to take the fact that an angel came down and stirred the waters and the first person into the waters was healed. I don't know whether that was like kissing the Blarney Stone or what it was.

I mean, those kind of traditions build up in society and people come to believe in them. And our society is sophisticated enough to tell you that if you believe in it enough, it'll probably happen. And so we build these kind of pools of Bethesda into our life. In a sense, stagnant pools out of which no life can come. And yet, around which we associate the possibility for something dynamic happening.

Our churches are sometimes a bit like those pools. People sit around them in various conditions of despair waiting for something to happen that never happens.

And you get caught in that situation. Jesus acts toward this man when he says to him, Well, I'm going to tell you right now, quite apart from the pool, I want to tell you what you're to do.

[13:32] And he says to the man, Rise, take up your pallet, and walk. And we're told when Jesus says that, The man was healed, he took up his pallet, and he walked.

Jesus acts here by telling somebody to do the impossible thing. Like the man with the withered hand who was stood up in the front of the synagogue congregation and told, Stretch out your hand. And he had to do the impossible thing. And his hand was healed, you know. He turns to the woman at the well and says to her, Go call your husband.

Well, that was impossible for her to do. But it was a command that he gave. It was a command which came from Jesus to someone who was in such a condition that it was impossible, on the basis of any human resources, to obey that command.

There was nothing he could do to get up and take up his bed and walk. I mean, he hadn't been sick for 38 years, if he could do that. And so, there was what Jesus did.

[14:57] And having done it, he then empowered the man to do the impossible thing. And I think that, I think this is terribly important, that you recognize that what Christ commands of you is impossible.

Most people have recognized that, and so they ignore what he commands. You know, they, if he, Jesus gives you a command, you ignore it, because you say it's impossible.

But he doesn't give the command because it's not impossible. He gives the command because he is able to empower you to obey it. That's why he gives it. And that's how he gives it.

So, the key to it, of course, is not your resources to do the impossible. It's the authority and the power of the Lord Jesus to accomplish in your life what he commands of your life, that when he asks you to do the impossible thing.

I've had some interesting things happen to me this week, good things. I don't know if you've noticed my better haircut this week.

[16:20] I had a wave in it even for a couple of days, but it's gone now. But I went to see a barber who's been in business for 30 years, who had a celebration of that in which he had back to his barber shop, the first person whose hair he had ever cut when he first came to Vancouver 30 years ago.

And he brought to the business of cutting my hair such enthusiasm and such warmth in his personality and such sort of confidence.

It was just a lovely experience. I mean, it was a totally renewing experience. And you just walk out of there feeling maybe life is possible after all.

Maybe it's possible to be something that you could never be. And that was just a touch with a man who is a wonderful barber, I think, and with a wonderful faith in Christ.

I went and talked to, I had somebody come into my office for some help. That's what I like to think. But in fact, a lady who had been through a long period of chemotherapy, a long period of radiation therapy, had spent, you know, had gone through the indignities of that kind of treatment and all those things, and came to me and decided to talk about my problems.

[18 : 10] And I poured out my problems. And, I mean, she was very much a person in Christ who just sort of transformed my situation from paralysis and atrophy and despair and hopelessness to great joy and a great sense of well-being just because of her own sort of being in the place of Christ ministering to me.

It was wonderful. And I could go on and tell you a couple more like that, which really have made, you know, I just thought about them when I came to this passage today to see how people can, in Christ's name, touch your life and bring new life to you.

We went, my wife had an accident. We went to see the doctor. And once the doctor found out what business we were in, he simply wouldn't shut up because he was so caught up with, after years in the practice of medicine, the fact that there are mental and spiritual dimensions to medicine which are terribly important.

And if you cut them off from the practice of medicine, why bother practicing medicine? I mean, he, and so, though all he did was put a cast on my wife's right leg, he, in fact, brought a lot of healing and renewal to both Fran and I, just by who he was and by his awareness of the grace and mercy of God at work in the hearts and lives of people.

much more healing there than he did for her foot. I mean, that, and more significant. So there's something really quite wonderful about the way Christ encounters this person and brings this person from 38 years of paralyzed, atrophy, waiting in despair to something brand new in their life.

[20 : 15] I just, I'm sure that it happens. I'm sure that it's meant to happen. I'm sure that it's meant to happen to everybody. Not just the lucky winners when the big wheel goes round and round.

But I think it's meant to happen to us all. I don't, I think, you see, what I think happens is that I think what we do is we see somebody who's had a great experience and then we take the overall statistics and we say, well, that doesn't mean anything.

It just fits in. It just is a slight blip on our statistical account of the prevailing despair that afflicts mankind. So don't pay any attention to it.

You know, that this person has changed doesn't mean anything. Christ seems to do the other way around. He goes into the crowd of despairing people and lifts up one person and says, this is what can happen.

And it can happen to you, too. You will want to take that and crush it, just as the people here wanted to take it and crush it. And they say, you can't say that this is from God because God has given us certain laws about the Sabbath.

[21 : 30] And so what you've done in healing this person is, in fact, simply to have broken the law. Well, they carry the argument on with Christ to the point where they're ready to take him out and kill him, you know, because of his blasphemy, because he says that he is working with the Father.

And they are suggesting you think you and God are the same person and they're ready to kill him. And Jesus makes quite a shrewd observation. He says, well, so it's Sunday afternoon and this is the Sabbath.

And we have the law about maintaining the Sabbath. And I'd like to suggest to you that there's two ways that you might maintain the Sabbath. One is by thinking what I'm thinking and that is that I want this man to be healed.

And the other is by thinking what you're thinking that you want me to be killed. Now, which one of us is observing the Sabbath? And so Christ reinterprets the whole of the Sabbath to them.

Well, that's terribly important that you understand this because, you see, what I think happens, the place we tend to lose our way is that this is a wonderful picture of healing.

[22 : 55] But that's only incidental to this story because this story is essentially about Jesus Christ.

And so your focus is not to be, as you listen to me, on the possibility that your life is going to be transformed this afternoon by some magical intervention, some stirring of the pool.

No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No.

No. No. No. Oh. No. Oh. Starting now. Here. That's what life is about, Christ says.

And when he calls the man back to him, he warns him to sin no more.

[23 : 58] Now, I think this is a rather sobering side of the story, and that is this. That having seen the power of Christ, releasing you, setting you free to be whom God means you to be, you don't go back and sin again.

Because the impotency that results from that makes it harder for you to hear the gospel and harder for you to respond.

You're giving yourself, you know. That's why Paul, when Paul got confronted by this, that if God is good at forgiving and I'm good at sinning, why don't we both do what we're good at?

That it was then that Paul said, God forbid. God forbid. You know, this is not just a kind of momentary moral reformation.

This is a passing from death to life. And you just don't go back. You don't give in to that again. God forbid.

[25 : 15] And that's why Jesus told this man. He went after him. He found him. He warned him.

So that what Jesus has done in this story is to invade the territory of the hopeless and the helpless and the friendless and to bring healing and hope and love into that situation.

Our society is wise enough to know that if you try and deal with the hopeless, the helpless and the friendless in your own strength, you will soon be one of them.

Hopeless, helpless and friendless. So avoid it. Unless the power of Christ is there to bring hope and to bring help and to bring friendship into the needy places of the world.

And that's what Christ says. One last illustration, just to bring you up to date and I'll go quit. Three things have happened in John's Gospel so far.

[26 : 27] Jesus has taken water, which the Jews used for purification, and he turned it into wine. Jesus goes to the woman at the well who offers him the wonderful water that Jacob himself gave to us.

And are you greater than our father Jacob? And Jesus says, yes, I am infinitely greater. That water which you draw every day is incomparable to the water that I give you, which will be the living water so that you never thirst again.

And here he comes to the dirty pool of Bethesda and says, you think healing comes from that? That water? It doesn't. Healing comes from me.

I am the source. So, you know, it's like when you go into a restaurant and the waiter comes up and says, would you like something from the bar?

It's embarrassing to say water so you could try one of these, you know. I would like water that will change into wine.

[27 : 38] I would like water that will satisfy my thirst forever. Or I would like water that will cure all my disease.

You know, and that's the kind of thing that Christ offers. And the kind of thing that sin teaches us not to accept.

And we need to pray that the power of sin will be broken, that we can receive it. Let me pray. Our God, we thank you for this amazing story of Christ's ministry to this poor, poor man.

and the transforming change that came into his life through that man, through the person of Jesus Christ.

And our Father, you haven't given us this story to tell us about something that could happen somewhere, at some other place to some other person. It must be that you've given the story to help us know what can happen to us right now, in this place, in this city, in our homes, in our families, in our work, in our understanding.

[29 : 07] Give us this water in Christ's name. Amen.