

John 5:1-18 “The Jesus We Must Not Miss”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Lord, I need you. We need you. We need you every hour. We need your healing. Our bodies, our souls. We need it forever. We need this morning, Jesus, to hear your voice. God, as we open your word, as we listen for your spirit, we need you. Speak to us. Change us. Rescue us. Heal us. Send us with your spirit and with your good news, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. One of the reasons that we need God even now and especially now in these moments is that it is so easy to be close to Jesus and yet miss Jesus.

[1 : 15] To experience his blessings and being a part of worshiping him and yet not be changed. To know a lot of things about him and yet not actually have a relationship with him.

Stuff where years ago I was in Auburn on a football Saturday. They ended up losing the game, I think to Clemson.

That's who it was. Yeah. But that's not the point of the story though. In case you didn't know or don't know the name Cam Newton.

Cam Newton is a legend of Auburn football greatness. Okay. The quarterback of the last national championship team there. He has a statue outside the stadium.

That's how amazing and great Cam Newton is. Anyway, we were on campus before the game. We were looking for some friends at a tailgate. And as we were searching for them, Cam Newton walked right by us.

[2 : 27] And we didn't know it. And he passed by us. And right after that, crowds of people come rushing by us and start gathering around him. Taking pictures. Getting autographs.

Walking with him to the stadium. We look back and we're like, oh, that's somebody important. And there was no chance to get to him then. He was surrounded by people.

No way we were going to get there. I had to settle instead for this picture with his statue. Because I missed the real thing.

I knew a lot about him. But I didn't really know him. I wasn't looking for him. And as close as I was to him and to all the joyful celebration that surrounded him.

I missed him. I tell you that story mostly to remind you that Clemson beat Auburn. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

[3 : 31] I tell you that story. That was for Derek. I tell you that story mostly to help you start considering the possibility of being close to Jesus.

But still missing him. It happens to many of the people involved in the story this morning. And I don't want it to happen to a single one of us.

Okay? Notice who Jesus is and how people miss him as I read John 5 beginning at verse 1. After this there was a feast of the Jews and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool in Aramaic called Bethesda which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids blind, lame, and paralyzed.

One man was there who had been an invalid for 38 years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time he said to him, Do you want to be healed?

[4 : 44] The sick man answered him, Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up. And while I am going another steps down before me. Jesus said to him, Get up.

Take up your bed and walk. And at once the man was healed and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, It is the Sabbath and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.

But he answered them, The man who healed me, that man said to me, Take up your bed and walk. And they asked him, Who is the man who said to you, Take up your bed and walk? Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was.

For Jesus had withdrawn as there was a crowd in the place. Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, See, you are well. Sin no more.

That nothing worse may happen to you. The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus.

[5 : 51] Because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, My father is working until now. And I am working. This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him.

Because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, But he was even calling God his own father, Making himself equal with God. The grass withers and the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.

This story that we just read is another of Jesus' healing miracles. And again, it is more than that. It's the third of the seven signs that John gives us to point to the identity of Jesus. So it's not surprising that this passage will unfold on multiple levels.

Kind of like peeling back the layers of an onion. It makes it a little tough to discern. What's the point? What's the primary thing here?

[6 : 59] And I want us to see each of those levels. So we're going to talk about first the physical miracle itself. The sign. And then the spiritual lessons.

What the sign points to about Jesus. Then the Sabbath conversation that comes out of nowhere. And finally the hubbub about Jesus' divine nature that ensues and begins here.

Along the way though, in each of those stages, Notice how people are missing Jesus. Because we can find ourselves doing the same things.

If we're not careful. We'll come back to that at the end. First, let's marvel at the miracle itself. Don't miss the fact that a man is being healed after 38 years of illness.

Likely some sort of paralysis. Apparently, there was this pool near the sheep gate in Jerusalem back then. Where the common belief was that when the water was stirred up naturally from underground.

[8 : 08] Or as many believed supernaturally. It had healing powers. The first person into the water at that time would be healed.

Well, for years, critics contended that there was no architectural structure like the one described here in verse 2 at all in the time of Jesus.

Until it was discovered by 19th century archaeologists. And they've uncovered it. And sure enough, there they are. Five roofed colonnades. Just like this.

And it's since been covered under multiple church buildings. Now you can go see the pool. And you can see some ruins. Pretty cool discovery. Exactly where John places it in the first century.

But even more than the historical nature of the pool. I hope you see the heart of Jesus here. Think about this place.

[9 : 09] This place was covered up with the blind. The lame. The paralyzed. Crowds of people. All hoping desperately for the right moment.

And this was a place many of us would be sure not to go. But Jesus was sure not to miss.

Many have noted that when Jesus was in Jerusalem, he frequented not palaces. Not the places of greatest power. But rather the places of greatest need.

Don't you love his heart of compassion here in this? Is that what his people are like today? Are we drawn to the needy? To places like this?

To standing against injustice? To loving the least? Are these the places we're sure to visit while we're on our vacation? This man doesn't even know Jesus.

[10 : 13] But Jesus knows that he has been there such a long time. And because of that moves toward him personally. Out of the whole crowd in order to bless him.

So notice when Jesus asks if he wants to be healed. The man thinks immediately. I would say naturally. Of needing help into the water.

Verse 7. He says, sir. I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up. Maybe you'll do that.

Jesus, on the other hand, is thinking supernaturally. He redirects the man's plan for healing. Healing again with a word.

Commanding the man to get up and take his mat. Which he does. And he's off. The life of the lowliest.

[11 : 14] Transformed by the power and mercy of Jesus. Jesus. It's a great picture of who he is. Once again, though, it's not merely an amazing miracle that Jesus does.

Alongside of that, it's a sign that points to who Jesus really is. Jesus' power to heal, to restore, is not bound by distance.

We saw last week. Right? Nor by time or severity of the situation. We see that here. He doesn't merely know how to access supernatural power.

Like how to get you into the pool quickly at the right time. No, he brings the supernatural power himself. Beyond that, we get a picture of the Messiah who has come to seek and to save the lost as promised.

Twice he seeks out this man, doesn't he? First to heal his body. But the next time, Jesus finds the man in the temple courts.

[12 : 21] I mean, it's crowds of people. It's a feast, right? Remember what's going on? Lots of people here. And Jesus finds him and he makes sure that he knows that he needs more than the physical healing he's received.

I'll be honest with you. This verse, the comment Jesus makes, verse 14, is hard to understand. It may mean that this man's illness was connected to a specific sin in his life.

But even if that's true here, Jesus is clear elsewhere that a particular sickness and a particular sin shouldn't be assumed to have that direct connection.

I think the best understanding of what Jesus is saying is, you are well physically. But that's not all. There's something else important. You also must repent of your sin, not continue in it, or you will face eternal judgment.

[13 : 26] That would be certainly the much worse thing than being paralyzed. And Jesus, who didn't get to say this earlier, has gone out of his way to find a man who hasn't expressed faith to this point in the story, to make sure he knows that there's a paralysis in his soul, not merely in his body that has been taken away.

See, repentance, turning from sin, is the pathway to knowing Jesus. This man was missing that piece. To knowing Jesus and thereby knowing life, avoiding eternal death.

Jesus goes out of his way to target this long-term crippled man. Spiritually speaking, we have to understand that no one is beyond the reach of Jesus.

No one is so messed up that he's beyond the restorative power of Jesus. No one has been running away so long that Jesus can't call her back to himself with a word.

Friends, if you are hearing this word this morning, if you're hearing God's word to you, it is not too late. It's not too late for you to throw yourself on the mercy of Jesus.

[14 : 51] Jesus, his deeply compassionate heart, his unparalleled power, and to find healing and life in him forever. Eternal life, Jeremy read it about, in knowing him.

Y'all, it just may be that God is seeking you again this morning. That's what he's like. He's a seeking kind of God.

From the very beginning, he sought Adam and Eve when they, full of shame in the garden, did what? They hid from him. He sought out Hagar in the wilderness when she felt overlooked and hopeless, and he found her.

He sought his idolatrous people when they ran after idols, turned from him, were scattered among the nations, and he sought after them and brought them back home.

This is what he's like. He is a seeking God, and Jesus demonstrates this beautifully here. Seeking the invalid. Seeking his soul as well as his body.

[15 : 59] Always initiating. Always moving towards us. Never too late for him to rescue and to restore. 19th century theologian Soren Kierkegaard marveled at this God who seeks us and loves us first.

He's always ahead of us, he said. He writes, if I rise at dawn and at the same second, the moment my eyes open and I think about being awake, if at that same second I turn my soul towards you in prayer, you are there ahead of me.

You have loved me first. When I get in the middle of the busy day, when I withdraw from the distractions of the day and turn my soul towards you, you are the first.

God has loved us first. You don't have to be paralyzed or sick or lonely this morning for this Jesus to be good news for you.

It may be that you're looking for hope. That you're lost in depression. That you're seeking purpose or significance in your life.

[17 : 08] He is showing you his compassionate heart. His amazing power. His never giving up pursuit. He's on the porch. He's looking out. He's ready to embrace you.

He's moving towards you first. He's always more eager to run to you than you are to run to him. He is loving you first today. That's who he is.

And all this happens and it's interesting at this point, all of a sudden with no notice ahead of time, after the man is healed and gone, we find out that all this happened when?

On the Sabbath. Which leads, as it turns out, to quite a bit of confusion and conversation. The Jews, our translation said, what's meant there is the religious leaders of that area around Jerusalem at the time.

They're more concerned that this man is carrying his mat on the Sabbath than that he's walking for the first time in 38 years. Can you imagine?

[18 : 15] Carrying the mat does not violate a specific Old Testament law. But the law does say not to work on the Lord's day.

So Jewish tradition at this time had codified 39 different categories of forbidden work. This fit one of those categories.

Jesus was clearly well aware of that. His words when he heals the man and tells him to take up his mat confirm that. Well, as the story goes, after seeking to pass the blame for this violation, right?

This newly healed man admits that he actually has no idea who it is he's passing the blame to. He doesn't know who healed him. When Jesus finds him again in the temple, the man gets his name. He tells the authorities this was the guy and they begin persecuting Jesus because of such Sabbath activities. What's really interesting here is what Jesus says in verse 17.

[19 : 21] What's his defense when they come to him? Does he just not care about the Sabbath? It's really not important anymore? No, that's not it. A little background.

The Jews taught then that the only person who could work on the Sabbath without sinning was Yahweh, God himself.

He created the world. He created the Sabbath on the seventh day. But then, of course, he had to sustain all of his creation all the time.

His work of sustaining and restoring the creation was constant. So Jesus' explanation for his work on the Sabbath here and in general is, my father is working until now and I am working.

In other words, God is my father and my father in such a way that anything that's good for him is good for me. If he is restoring creation, I can act mercifully to restore an ailing part of the creation even on the Sabbath.

[20 : 35] Part of that Sabbath principle is for all of us. There's truth there for any of us. Works of mercy, restoring creation are part of our calling, not violations of God's direction for us.

Okay? Here's something opening up for your Sabbath opportunities. One of the things that's helped my family as we've tried to approach the Sabbath thoughtfully is rather than listing all of the things not to do, it can sometimes get discouraging.

We try to think intentionally of restorative things that we should do. Whether it be resting our bodies and souls, baking or visiting with someone lonely or hurting.

I think I just said baking someone lonely or hurting. Baking for someone lonely or hurting. Very different type of restoration.

There are other better ideas than that one, if you can imagine it. Maybe there's something that you can do together as a family that is restorative for your relationships.

[21 : 47] It's worshiping and fellowshiping with your church family that is healing there. There are so many things to do with God, to do with one another, to do with our neighbors, that if we're intentional enough about that, you may not have time.

You may rarely get to the things that you shouldn't do. Right? But the primary Sabbath principle here is one that is specifically applicable to Jesus.

It's that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath as he calls himself elsewhere. He uniquely may work on the Sabbath as he redeems and restores all of his creation.

Wait, wait, what? Did he really say his? His? Is it? This is peeling back one more layer of the onion to open up a new controversy between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. They hear Jesus loud and clear on this. He is claiming equality with Yahweh, they recognize. Jesus. Verse 18.

[23 : 02] This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God.

Jesus is about to talk about this reality for the next several verses to explain who he is and what his relationship with God is like. So this is just a peek into next week's sermon.

We'll focus more here. Jesus saying he's equal with God. But for now, just know that that, that that reality at the end of the day is what he would have the leaders, the man he has healed, and us see about who he is.

He wants us to see clearly that he indeed is God in the flesh. Come to us uniquely because of who he is able to rescue and restore us.

But do you see how seemingly everyone in this passage is missing Jesus? They're right there with him. He's passing right by him.

[24 : 14] They're experiencing his blessings and his power. They are listening to him speak. They might be snapping a selfie with him. I don't know, but he is right there with them.

And they're missing him. Aren't they? Is it possible that we might be doing the same thing? Let's see if we can learn briefly from some of the ways that they miss Jesus.

Look at the man who gets healed and then at the Jewish leaders. One of the ways the man seems to miss Jesus up front is by just focusing on what Jesus can do for him.

He gets the healing he wants. That's what he really wanted. And he doesn't even get the healer's name. It's all about him. What Jesus can do for him. I'm not going to linger there because that's the struggle we discussed at length last week.

But it's also possible to see this man missing Jesus because of being content in his life of sin. Unwilling to change his life at a deep level.

[25 : 22] Perhaps that's part of Jesus' appeal to him in the temple courts when he says, Turn from your sin. Or things worse than what you've experienced in this life are going to come after it.

Do we sometimes get so comfortable in our sin, in our self-serving lifestyles, that maybe even without thinking about it, we no longer see the need for Jesus.

But especially, I think the man misses Jesus in a way Jesus wants to correct for him. It's so important. Because he thinks of Jesus merely as the helper to what he really needs.

Isn't this what he thinks when Jesus asks him if he wants to be healed? What's he thinking? Oh, you know, yeah. And now that you mention it, what I really need is that pool.

That water. That's what I really need. And if you're offering to help get me there, great. We could make a good team. Jesus could have chosen to heal him that way, helping him into the pool.

[26 : 40] But I think Jesus wanted to make sure to communicate that he was the source of the healing. He was what the man really needed. What do you think you most need?

Significance? Security? Satisfaction? You know, maybe if I follow Jesus closely enough, they'll put me up front on the stage and I'll feel important.

Maybe Jesus could help me feel better when I'm hurting and I just don't know how to handle it.

That'd be great. Maybe Jesus will help me get the job or the family or the life that I've been longing for.

And then I will be really happy. Friends, Jesus is the life that you are longing for.

When we miss that, we're missing who he really is. Knowing him is abundant life, eternal life. In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, purpose and significance and true peace and security eternally.

[28 : 03] He has left glory, security, privilege and power so that you can know who God is. So that you can actually know God and experience the relationship that you were made to delight in.

But you were hopelessly separated from until he came and gave his blood to pay for your sin. It would so saddened. It would so sadden me if you came here and you heard words of hope and life but missed Jesus.

Thinking that he was just a means to that end, that thing you came needing and longing for. And Jesus would help you get there rather than realizing that Jesus is life itself.

Thinking that you could come here and you could check the church box, the Jesus box. I've got that in my back pocket for when I need it. And now I'm going to go live this week and the rest of my life on my own without really needing him.

I'll have him if I need him. I'll have him for eternity. But all the time missing life because you're missing Jesus. He doesn't want that for you.

[29 : 09] Talk about being close to Jesus. The religious leaders know the Bible. They know the commentaries on the Bible.

They haven't missed a Lord's Day service in years. They've been in the same seat in the pew. They even have a vantage point from which they can see everyone else messing up.

But when the hope of heaven comes to earth right in front of them, when the God of creation begins to heal, when the Lord of the Sabbath brings true rest, all they can see is rules being broken.

If the man missed Jesus in his weakness and brokenness, the leaders missed Jesus in their strength and goodness. Friends, you talk about God.

You read about God. You even sing about God really beautifully. I enjoy doing it with you. What a tragedy it would be if all those things were true and if God walked right by and you didn't even recognize him.

[30 : 27] You may have your picture made on Easter Sunday at church. You may wear a cross necklace to school. You may stay out of trouble better than the average person.

But you may be missing the one thing that matters. The great Savior himself, the true king, the perfect righteousness come for you.

If you do a lot of right things and a lot of good things, but you never abandon yourself to the mercy of Jesus, you will miss true life, which consists not merely in doing a lot of good things, but in actually knowing the good God himself.

knowing his unfailing love, his perfect righteousness for you, his peaceful presence when you're hurting, his unfailing grace, no matter what you do, it keeps coming.

No matter what life brings, he's always there. And if you miss life with him, you'll face judgment apart from him with only your own decent record rather than his perfect record.

[31 : 59] What a grief that would be. Listen, I love you too much.

Not to say clearly that Jesus would not have you miss him today. That's his heart for you. He calls to you from his word. He calls to you from this table.

I am drawing near to you again. I came to give my life so that you could have life. I come to restore everything that's broken and needs healing in you and in this world.

I am the one who restores. I'll do it today or I'll do it someday, but I'm going to make it right. I'm the only one you can look to for that. Don't insist on staying in your sin.

Don't insist on staying alone in your goodness. You don't need me to get you to the water, Jesus says. You just need me. And here I am giving myself to you.

[33 : 02] Embrace me. Receive me. Don't miss me. Learn what I love. Here's my word. Lean on my body.

Here's my church, my people there for your support. Live on my mission. Here's my heart to share with broken and needy people desperately longing for healing.

But don't miss me. I've come again this morning loving you first so that you may believe and have life.

It's what he said to his disciples on that night that he was betrayed when he put himself in as the Passover lamb, slain to give life to those otherwise condemned to die.

He sat with them. He took bread and he broke it. He gave it to his disciples. As I'm ministering in his name, give this bread to you. He said, take and eat.

[34 : 11] This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And the same way after supper he took the cup and said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Drink from it, all of you. For as often as you eat this bread and you drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. His death for you.

Come to Jesus. He has come to you. He has loved you first. He keeps loving you first. He's coming to you again. If you're a baptized member of his church, this one or any other that preaches the good news of the Bible, come and feast and taste that love again today.

If you honestly say this morning, well, I only know about Jesus. I'm just considering Jesus.

Honestly, I'm running from Jesus. I've known about him for a long time and I am running away. Then don't come to this table. But hear the voice of Jesus this morning inviting you to come to him, to the one who offers true life.

[35 : 27] We invite you to come, even come forward and observe. We'd love to pray with you. We'd love to talk with you more about who he is. But I would appeal to all of you, don't sit before this table and miss Jesus.

He is the one pointed to here. He's the only one this is about. He's come to invite you to be with him.

Let's pray. Jesus, would you give us eyes to see your body and blood given for us that we might truly do this in remembrance of you.

Show us our need. May we see that clearly if any of us is missing that. But then Jesus, show us how perfectly you meet our need.

We ask it in your name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. Thank you.