

When Jesus Blesses Us

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[0 : 0 0] Turn with me, please, to John's Gospel, chapter 5. John, chapter 5, picking up where we left off just before Christmas at the end of chapter 4, and continuing our series of studies in this morning. I do want to give you a very... It's great that so many of you have made it out. I don't know what the weather will be like later on today, and it's a bit grotty, but it's great to see you this morning. I do give you a very warm welcome, whether you're here or whether you're on Zoom. It's nice. If you can't make it, you can at least Zoom in as well. You go on YouTube, just search under Westerhailes Baptist Church, and there we are in all our glory. So you can always do that if the weather's quite bad, and we've not got the notice out to you in time. You can join us there, so you're welcome if you're joining us on Zoom. So let's read together this passage. We're reading the account of the healing at the pool, and we'll read the first 15 verses. Some time later, we are told, 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. I've got a story of Bethesda, and which is surrounded by five colored 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 thirty-eight years. 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? 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. 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.

The day in 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 forbid you to carry your 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 told you to pick it up and walk? The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, See, you're well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well. We'll end our reading at the end of verse 15. Let's come before God in prayer.

Let's ask for his help. Our loving Father, we thank you for your word. Lord, what great privilege is ours to read and to study your word. So Father, we pray that you would first of all help us to understand this passage that we have read together. But help us, Lord, not just to understand it, but to apply it to our life. So Father, speak to us now, we pray. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Happy New Year. We, I'm not wishing, well, I'm wishing you a Happy New Year. But that is something we say a lot, isn't it, at this time of year. I wonder if how many times you've said that since the bells on Tuesday evening or into Wednesday morning. We say it a lot. Happy New Year. You've probably said it quite a few times. What do we mean when we say this? Often we just do it. It's tradition, isn't it? New Year, happy. It's good to stop and to think happy. The BBC often do a thing usually at the start of the year about happiness, what makes us happy, money or health or various things. And we probably wish that for ourself. We hope that 2025 will make us happy.

[4 : 05] But if you're thinking in biblical terms, the word happy is better translated in the Bible as blessed. It's a better word. And it's in many ways, it's something that we would wish people or want for people, not just at this time of year, but throughout the year, especially if you're pinging emails to folk. I have various standard ways of closing. Every blessing, you say, every happiness that you some, or grace and peace, or whatever Calvinistically yours, whatever you decide to sign off with, that can be anything. But every blessing, we wish God's people to be blessed. And that is really a better way. And maybe we've not thought of what we mean by happy new year, but if you change the word to blessed, have a blessed new year, what do we mean by that?

That God will bless us. That is the best blessing you can have in 2025. Not when you are trying to achieve things for yourself. The world will do this. They will bust a gut to have a happy new year.

But as Christians, we seek God's blessing in 2025. That is the happiest new year that we can ever have, the blessing of God in our life. And that is the best form of happiness, you could say.

This morning in this passage, in the moments that remain to us, I want to look at what happens when Jesus blesses us. And really, that is what this passage has to do with. It's what happens when Jesus blesses us, and the implications of that for each one of us. So, let's look at this together.

We're continuing a series of studies in the Gospel of John. You remember John tells us at the very end of his gospel, why he's writing, that Jesus did many other things, many other miracles. But John has recorded specific miracles. Indeed, this account here, that you have here, is the only account in Jesus, that John records in Jesus' whole second year of ministry. He doesn't take things chronologically in that sense. This is the only thing of a whole year of ministry that John records is in his second year. And therefore, this is very important. He wants us to understand who Jesus is, and that we might believe in him, and that we might trust in him. Last time, you remember, we considered a second sign, a second miracle, you could say, that Jesus did, that John gives us. That's how it finished. This was the second sign. You remember the first sign was in the same place in Cana, when Jesus turned water into wine. People saw this. They believed. They believed in Jesus because of what they saw. Their faith showed itself based on a miracle that Jesus had done. This second sign was a more impressive sign in many ways, that Jesus could be trusted or was impressive because of what he says, not just because of what he does. And this ruler took Jesus at his word and believed, and he went his way, and his son was healed. And he took Jesus at his word and departed. It is very impressive. So, Jesus is impressive, not just because of what he does, because of what he says. And we can trust the words of Jesus.

[7 : 40] If you're—I'm reading. I'm back on my five-day reading plan. I'm in Genesis, but I'm in Mark as well. And I know some of you are in that five-day reading plan as well. If you have not started, I commend that one to you. I'm in Mark. So, we can trust the very words of Jesus. If he says something, we can take them on board. Now, in this chapter, when you get to chapter 5 in the Gospel of John, something new happens. And we'll look at this probably more next time, but there's a new theme here, and it's—you will see this from chapter 5 right to the very end of John's Gospel.

You now see opposition to Jesus. Up to now, in John's Gospel, chapter 1 to 4, people are wondering, who is Jesus? What is he all about? They're weighing him up. They're deciding whether to believe or whether not to believe. But now, opposition arises. And in this case, it was to do with the healing on the Sabbath. Now, the religious leaders rise up against Jesus, and this will continue from chapter 5 right the way through. Once you get to the end of chapter 7, there is certainly outright official opposition. Chapter 6, when we get to chapter 6, or if you decide to do that, the disciples abandon Jesus. Some of them, not the 12, but the rest will leave. Many of them will leave chapter 7. He'll be accused of having demon possession as well. And throughout all of this, and we'll look at this next time, Jesus emphasizes who he is and his relation to the Father. He is the Son, and God is his Father.

But before we look at that, and we'll look at that next time, the authority of the Son, where Jesus begins to defend himself to the religious leaders. I'm not wanting to be taking that up with that today, the opposition, but to note that this is it now beginning. So, before all this, Jesus, in the midst of this persecution, heals somebody. He heals a man who was unable to walk for 38 years. And in studying this, we can see something about how Jesus sometimes works in the life of people, and how we should respond to that. It's very much about the grace of God. It's to do with the grace of God. And Jesus begins this by asking a question to this man, do you want to get well? And as a result of that, he heals him. So, I want to look at this when Jesus blesses us. So, I've expanded this more than just healing. I think when I preached in this a long time ago, I just looked at healing. But really, it's times when Jesus comes into our life and blesses us, makes us happy, in other words, does something for us. It can be healing, or it can be something else. So, I don't want to just narrow it down to that. But a time, or times when Jesus does this. So, I've only got two points this morning. And the first point is this, blessings and grace. The blessings that come to us through the grace of God. Jesus, about possibly a year and a half after the Samaritan, all this didn't happen in a weekend. He healed, he spoke to the Samaritan woman, then this man, then this. This is Jesus' second year. And probably about a year and a half after these other things happened, that's just some time later. It is some time later. Jesus went up to Jerusalem to one of the Jewish festivals. John does this a lot. He links Jesus' ministry to a festival, Passover, Feast of Tabernacles, or whatever.

He doesn't tell us what festival this is. It's probably not that important, because it's not linked to the actual healing. He's just telling us it was for one of the festivals. Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

And we are told the scenario, verse 2, there's a sheep gate, a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda. And it's described in a great number of disabled people used to lie there. If this is the scene that's recorded for us in Nehemiah, this is an opening in the north wall of the city. There were various gates. It's a great study to do that. I remember doing that a while ago. I commend that to you. Study the gates and how they were used in those days. But anyway, the sheep gate, the north of the city, it was basically sheep were washed in the pool at the sheep gate before they were used in the sanctuary and sacrifice and so forth. It was also a place where invalids came in the hope of being healed, certainly in Jesus' day. But the upper class and those wishing to be pure, they wouldn't go to this area, lest they are unclean. But Jesus goes to this area. And it says something a lot about

[12 : 45] Jesus. Many sick people gather there. Verse 3, a great number of disabled people used to lie, the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. We are told roughly how this comes about. And most of it's explained in the footnote, which isn't Scripture really. Usually what happens is, as the Gospels are being recorded, you have the manuscripts, as it were, and over a period of time, people copy them. It's not the day where you could say, oh, John, you couldn't ping me that document, could you? Here's my email address, just send me this. People have to copy it. Copyists, they're called. And many people are copying. And these people copy the Scriptures, before we have them in this form. Some folk, some of them might put a footnote saying, oh, by the way, this is, in case you're wondering what that bit is, that's what you have in this case. So, the footnote, verse on my Bible, it says here, they waited for the moving of the waters from time to time. An angel of the Lord would come down, stir up the waters. The first one into the pool, after each disturbance, would be cured whatever disease he had. There is no biblical mandate for this description. But there's no reason to doubt. That's why they're there. They believe that an angel would perhaps come down and stir up the waters. That's certainly why he is here.

Other commentators say, yes, well, these pools were fed by large reservoirs called Solomon's pools, but they were also fed by intermittent springs, natural springs, which would cause the water to bubble. Like Bath, in various places like that, these natural springs, but it's attributed to angels.

I leave you to fight that one out between yourself, whether it's angels that really do this, whether it's natural, whether it's what they believe. I don't know. It's not the main thing in our topic this morning. But we are told of a man who was there for 38 years. He'd been an invalid for 38 years, and Jesus heals him. Now, this healing is very unusual. It's an unusual healing, and it's worth noting for that very reason. Let me tell you some of the reasons why it's unusual.

The recipient of this blessing from Jesus was unknowing, or he didn't have a clue. He really didn't know who Jesus was. Unlike others who come and ask for this healing, who know Jesus, he does. This man is minding his own business. He's just lying there. He's not seeking Jesus out.

But Jesus is about to enter into his world. He's about to do something life-changing for this man. He's approached by Jesus rather than the other way around, whether it's the water into wine Jesus' mother comes, whether it was the man we looked at last time, where he comes and says, heal my son. This man, clueless, really doesn't know who Jesus is, doesn't know anything about him.

[16 : 00] He's sitting there. Jesus just happens to go by. But he is approached by Jesus. Verse 6, when Jesus saw him lying and had learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, do you want to get well? The word learned, the natural reading is he inquired about this man. See this guy here. How long has he been like this? 38 years. He's learned this.

He's inquired. So, he asked him the question. We don't know why Jesus decided to single him out, why he didn't just say, wow, that must have been hard. We don't even know why he made a point of inquiring about this man. But we are not told this. But he asked him a question. Do you want to get well? It's a strange question to ask, isn't it? Do you want to get well? I was looking through the bulletin just before, because I had to do incessory prayer, and I thought, I hope I've not missed somebody out, and I probably have. But I'm amazed at the number of folk pray for the health of, the health of, the health of. And if you asked any one of those people, do you want to get well?

I'm sure that everyone would say, yeah, I wouldn't mind, actually. I wouldn't mind getting well. It's a strange question to ask. The guy's been there for 38 years. So, he asks the question. Some commentators suggest that not everyone wants to get well. They say it's a life-changing situation. They've been in a particular lifestyle for such a long time. They're friends with so many different people.

I remember living next door to a young man in Northern Ireland who was involved in a motorbike accident. He was paralyzed from here down. He could use his arms, but nothing else. But he, he's, his whole life changed, and he played basketball, I think, for Northern Ireland. He had so many different friends. His whole life was different. I'm sure if I'd said to him, do you want to get well? He probably would have said yes. So, but it would involve a massive life change. His whole life would change.

So, some commentators say, maybe Jesus is asking for that. Do you really want to get well? But it's more likely to be that he wants the man to consider his condition. He wants him to think about his condition before he does something. God will sometimes do that with us. I'm sure if you look back over your life and you think of the times when your faith has grown, when you've learned something, when you appreciate the blessing of God, it's when you've come through a difficult time.

[18 : 43] I know this in my own life when there's maybe been a period of difficulty, whatever that's caused by, a month or two months or three months or six months. It's during that time that you, God can bless you, you can work in your life in a powerful way such that your faith increases. And you'd, you'd go back to that years later and say, God, you did that then. You will help me in 2025. I'm sure as we enter into a new year, you can recall blessings in 2024. If we were meeting tonight, I would have said, we would have a time of open testimony, testifying to Lord's goodness over the past year. And you have that and you know that. You don't get these blessings lying on the beach. You might get the beach blessing, but that's all. And that doesn't sustain you very long. But the blessings that you receive during the difficult times are the best. And it could be that Jesus is simply asking them, do you realize how messy your condition is? He wants them to realize his predicament, to expand on his predicament. He's saying, I'd love to be healed, but I can't get down to the water.

I come here every time and these guys are faster than me. I am so slow. It's driving me nutty. I've been doing this for 30 odd years. You have no idea how difficult this is. I'm sure if it was you and I asked him this, we'd get a big moaning session for a long time about how difficult this guy's life has been. And it might be simply that reason that Jesus asked him. I'm asking you, mister, to consider how messy your life is and how I am about to change it for the better. And God might do that with us before the blessings might come in 2025. He may take us through a difficult time so that the diamonds appear brighter against the black background. And don't despise that time. If it comes in March or April or May, Lord, this is hard. God in his grace can transform that. And that will be richer for all that difficulty you've gone through. That will be more rejoicing. It's a bit like Christmas, isn't it? How many times can you eat rich food and you just take it for granted?

There's more steak pie. There's more of this bread sauce, cranberry stuff, more chocolate, more cheese, more whatever. You just think, you take it for granted, but at the start it appears good. But when you come through the difficulty, and that's what I think that the Lord is trying to do with him. Whatever he's wanting to face up to, what his life is like, how bad it is, and how the Lord is going to transform it. But this man doesn't know Jesus at all. Secondly, under this, he's unworthy to receive this blessing. It's a strange one. Six things. Note these six things very quickly why this is a strange blessing. This man didn't ask to be healed. He was minding his own business. He didn't, like the wee campaign, try praying. He didn't do this. He didn't know who Jesus was when he was asked, who told you to lift up your mat. We were told in verse 18, the man who was healed had no idea. That's the words, who it was. Not a scooby, not a clue as to Jesus. Thirdly, he doesn't come across as a devout believer, as somebody who is worthy to have this done for him. He's unworthy of this. He doesn't have the faith of the official. He's like a grumpy old man. And you see this in his character. When he's asked about Jesus who did this, he doesn't try to defend Jesus. He just says, the man who made me well. It was a man. Don't know who he was. And he's unlike the man that you meet in chapter 9, remember, who was healed. And the religious leaders come and say, who told you to do this? And this man is prepared to argue with the religious leaders. He says, now, it's remarkable. You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. And then he says, if this man were not from God, he could do nothing. Two different men. This man was new Jesus, defended Jesus. This guy, you don't get the impression that that's the case. And in this passage, you're told that he seems to have continued his life of sin afterwards. You know, more about that in a moment. But Jesus finds him in the temple. See, you're well again. Stop sinning. He just continues to sin. And then when he discovers who Jesus is, you read this, and the natural reading is, he grasses Jesus up. It's as quick as—once he discovers it's

Jesus, whoosh! Immediately, we are told, as soon as the man went away, after Jesus rebukes him, stop sinning, something worse might happen to you, the man went away and told the Jewish leaders it was him. He did it. Not to praise him, but simply to daub him in. You don't get the impression this guy is worthy of any of this. Here is the grace of God. It really is quite remarkable. He wasn't chosen for healing, for blessing, because he was worthy. His moral character, he was clueless, he was ungrateful, he was ungrateful, he's a habitual sinner. That is the grace of God, that God does this. And he will do this with members of your family, even though they do not acknowledge God. He is a gracious God. He does not deal with us according to our sin. And he will bless us, I'm sure, in many times when we don't feel we deserve it. Sometimes we think, well, I'm coming to church and I'm doing this, that, and the other, so yeah, I expect God to bless. But every blessing, even as a Christian, is by the grace of God. If you're here in good health, that is God's grace.

That is God's goodness. If you have a home and nice family and friends and a job or whatever in the future looks good, that is the grace of God. God is good to us. So we learn that all God's gifts are by grace. But we see here there is a difference between physical and spiritual healing. You can be physically healed, but not spiritually healed. And that's what's happening to this man. He's physically well. You thought, great, but he's not spiritually well. He's no great desire to follow Jesus or to serve the Lord in gratitude. But it should wake him up. Blessings are not, most of the time, your faith has healed you. This man had no faith. He didn't really know who Jesus was.

[25 : 35] But healed by grace alone is the undeserved grace of God. So that's what we see, first of all, blessing sin. Jesus heals this man. But we are told that it's almost as if he's making this guy object of his attention. He finds out how long he's been unwell and heals him. And later Jesus found him at the temple, not just saw him, but he found him, stopped sinning. Jesus makes a point of going up to warn this man that he is just. He can learn so much from it. But Jesus clearly connects his first illness with sin, where he says, see you're well again, stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. He's linking his past condition with sin. Now, that's a very dangerous thing to do.

Normally, it was common in Jesus' day, if somebody's unwell, they're a sinner in some way. Rabbi, who sinned? This man or his parents? John chapter 9. Jesus says, neither. His illness is not related to sin in any way, but that God might be, his glory might be seen. We need to beware of this. Neither this man or his parents sin, but this happened so that the works of God. However, the natural reading of this, and Don Carson would take this view very much as well, that this man's illness was related to personal sin. It's not to say every, and hardly any, if ever, illness is related to sin. But the implications are this particular one was, and we don't know why that is. We don't know, but that's certainly some of the commentators, and it's perhaps why Jesus chose to heal him.

But there are times when difficulties come. Difficulties might come to you in 2025, and it might actually be a result of your sin. The church at Corinth, where you remember at communion, a man ought to examine himself before he eats the bread and drinks the cup. They were getting drunk. They were up to all sorts of stuff. And Paul actually says, that is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. He, Paul, was brave enough to say, the reason half the folk in this church, he says to Corinth, are sick, is because of the way you're living. You're not treating the things of God right. It is related to sin. Your illness is related to sin. John says in one of his letters, 1 John 5, if anyone sees a brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, in other words, there is a sin that leads to death. You should pray that it will be forgiven. I remember a time in ministry when it was, I used to visit folk. I used to be rather foolish. I used to visit folk that were difficult cases. You would just moan and whinge the minute you went through the door.

Moan and whinge, moan and whinge at the church. See that church, that church, and see that person there. And I used to adopt it, the policy or the strategy. I'll get rid of all these bad ones at first.

But I'd leave after about three or four of these visits. I wanted to jack the ministry, and I thought, this is a disaster. Who could put up with this? Whereas I always finished with Kathleen Graham.

[29 : 10] That was her name. A wee wifey that was on her own. I visited her, and she really cheered you up. You left her, and she was like being charged with batteries. You just come out feeling better.

Life is great. I've just visited Kathleen, and it's a big difference. But I remember one year, there was a group of folk in the church, and they were all at that. See that church, that blah, blah, blah. I've been going there for ages. They sucked a life at you. But very soon, the Lord took them all.

They all died within a short space of time. So much so that I said to a pastor at the time, do you believe that the Lord will sometimes take his saints if they feel they are serving no useful purpose? And he said, without even thinking about it, I have no doubt the Lord does that. And it shouldn't surprise us. If you're a Christian, and all you're doing is moaning and whinging at the church and discouraging people in the church, or discouraging other Christians, we should not be surprised that the Lord says, enough. I'm going to take you to be with myself. Not as a punishment, but these people need to flourish. I'm doing a work through them. They need to be allowed to grow.

They don't need you bending their ear. And I think sometimes the Lord does that. He takes us away. Only he knows why he does what he does. But that's what John says. Many of you are sickly.

Because you're not living the life that you should. And that can be the case. There are times when the Lord disciplines us. Hebrews 12, I'm hoping. I'm sure that Happy New Year doesn't involve Hebrews 12.

[30 : 52] I'm sure none of you are praying, Lord, Hebrews 12 would be great. Lord, do not despise the Lord's discipline. Do not lose heart when he rebukes you. Nobody's praying for that. We're praying for a happy new year. We don't want a disciplined new year, even though we're sons or daughters of God.

We don't want that. But that might be a lot. Why? So that we are reformed by this. So that we are changed. It can take the form of discipline and sickness and health and unemployment and conflict or change of any nature. It can come. The Lord's hand is upon us. The Lord's desire is always to heal us, though. It's not to break us. He breaks and he heals. But we need to see this. And in the case with this man, the Lord has healed him, but he says to him, something worse might happen to you.

Some folks say that something worse is maybe talking about eternal judgment and so forth. The difficulties of life are God's megaphone to arouse us to our true spiritual condition.

He doesn't just want to heal us, but he wants to restore us to himself. As I thought about this, there are members of our families, I've got members of my family that aren't saved, and I've said to them, Happy New Year. Now, what do I mean by that? Probably nothing. Happy New Year. You say it, it's done. But if I start to think, what do I want from them? I want them to have a blessed New Year.

I want them to know something of the grace of God. I want them to be happy. I want them to have a good job, a good health, or whatever, all the stuff that comes under happiness. I want them to be blessed by God. And if that's to be the case, it will only be by grace. As I didn't deserve it, they don't deserve it. If anybody's to know a happy or a blessed New Year by God, it will always be by grace.

[32 : 51] But if God does that, and if God does bless them, there are implications. The Lord is not Santa Claus. He does it in such a way where he says, I've done this for you physically, but I want more for you. You need to be restored to me completely. I want complete restoration, not just for you to walk after 38 years, but to be fully restored to me. That is a better blessing. That is a fuller blessing. And I'm sure you would know that, not just to have an answer to prayer for a loved one that's a temporal blessing, but an eternal blessing, where they are now children of God. They know God. They walk with God. Jesus has restored them physically as well as spiritually. So Jesus would ask us, do you want to get well? Do you want to be blessed? Well, I'll bless you, and if I do, it's by grace. But if I bless you, stop sinning,

John, or stop sinning, member of your family. Begin to realize who I am, and begin to walk with me in a way that pleases me in 2025. I know so many people that want blessed, that want a happy new year, but they don't want God. They don't want the implications of this. This was this man. It may not be true of members of your family. We need to pray for complete blessing. So when you think back to your happy new years for your unconverted members of your family, maybe even for yourself, may you see is more than just happiness, but complete restoration. Does that make sense, folks? It's a powerful passage, this. But the grace of God just shines through. The grace of God to the undeserving, of which that is you and I. But along with this comes a life worthy of the gospel. That is a life that we have to live. We're going to stand and sing. I like the songs that Paul has chosen, and I like this song. What is our hope in life and death? This is Christ is our hope in 2025 and beyond the grave as well. Let's stand and we'll sing this together.

We did well that last song. Let's just close in prayer. Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you, Lord, for this passage that we have considered this morning. We thank you for the reminder, Lord, that you're a gracious God. You do not deal with us according to our sin, but you are gracious to us. You know how to bless us. You know how to make us happy, Lord, in the new year.

Lord, we seek your blessing above all, not just in temporal things, but in spiritual things. So, Father, we pray that we might hunger and thirst after Christ himself. And, Father, with these blessings, Lord, help us to live a life, therefore, worthy of the gospel, a life of gratitude. And, Father, what we pray for ourself, we pray for members of our family who too want to be blessed, but without the obedience. Lord, we pray that you might speak into their lives, into their situation. Come to them in grace, but come to them in power and transform them, Lord, to live that life worthy of the gospel, to stop sinning and to live a life worthy of Christ.

Lord, this would be our prayer moving forward in 2025. Hear us, we pray. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you, folks.