

Faithless Healing

John 5:1-15

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Introduction: I once knew a man who returned from a mission trip telling me that there had been 16,000 conversions where he preached and that he had performed thousands of healings. I had been to the hospital recently and asked him if he would not like to come and “put them out of business” for I was sure there were nowhere near 1,000 sick people in our little hospital.

At that point he told me that he could not because people in America do not have faith to be healed. Unless a person has sufficient faith then they cannot be healed.

On another occasion a lady began to frequent the services of our little church. She explained one day that she had left her church because she was sick and the people there all condemned her for her lack of faith to be healed. Not only was she physically sick, but was also condemned by her friends for being sick.

Why am I preaching this sermon: Both of these are examples of what is called “Faith Healing.” You can catch their services on TV most any night. What I want to talk to you about this morning is, for want of a better term, “Faithless Healing.” It is healing that depends on the power of God and not on the ability of men to believe hard enough. I want us to see the fallacy of men claiming to do what only Christ can do.

The passage this morning contains one verse that is almost certainly an insertion by a well meaning scribe sometime after John wrote. Verse four is awkward and uses words that John never uses. *John MacArthur* observes that “the omitted section contains more than half a dozen words or phrases foreign to John’s writings including three not found anywhere else in the New Testament. These facts, alone with the absence of any specific mention of angels in the rest of the passage, indicate that the section was not part of John’s original account. . . In the years after John wrote his gospel, scribes apparently added this material as a marginal note to present the popular explanation for the stirring of the water.” Here is the account from John chapter five.

John 5:1-15 After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ² Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep *gate* a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. ³ In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered,

waiting for the moving of the waters; ⁴ for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.

⁵ A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying *there*, and knew that he had already been a long time *in that condition*, He said to him,

"Do you wish to get well?" ⁷ The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me." ⁸ Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk." ⁹ Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and *began* to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day. ¹⁰ So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet." ¹¹ But he answered them, "He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Pick up your pallet and walk.'" ¹² They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up *your pallet* and walk '?" ¹³ But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in *that* place. ¹⁴ Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you." ¹⁵ The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

John gives us insight into:

- The superstition of healers and their victims [1-5]
- The sovereignty of Christ over our lives [6-9]
- The stupidity of legalists and their religion [10-13]
- The sympathy of Christ for sinners [14-15]

The superstition of healers and their victims [1-5]

John 5:1-15 After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ² Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep *gate* a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. ³ In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, *waiting for the moving of the waters;* ⁴ **for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.** ⁵ A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.

After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem: This would be the conversion of the Samaritans and the healing of the nobleman's son up in Galilee.

Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep *gate* a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. ³ **In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered:** This is a factual place mentioned by Nehemiah.

Nehemiah 3:1 Then Eliashib the high priest arose with his brothers the priests and built the **Sheep Gate**; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They consecrated the wall to the Tower of the Hundred *and* the Tower of Hananel.

What is not mentioned is why the multitudes of sick, blind, lame and withered people came to believe they might be healed there. It is this information that someone wanted to fill in for John at a later date. They probably wrote it in the margin at first...sort of like a

Study Bible note. But eventually it got inserted into later manuscripts as part of the text. Now let me read it to you from the NASB.

³ In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, *waiting for the moving of the waters;* ⁴ *for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted*

Notice how unlike the rest of the text it sounds. Even when translated into English it makes you stumble over it. Let's notice a couple of other things about it as well. These are the superstitions of human healers in the first century:

- The times of available healings were unpredictable so men had to spend their entire lives waiting for the chance to be healed.
- An angel had to stir the water before it had any healing capacity
- Whatever healing properties the angel imparted to the water was only enough for one person.
- Only the persons least in need of healing had any chance of getting it. The truly desperate had no opportunity whatsoever to be healed

In our day the details are slightly different. If you will send money to a healer he will send you a handkerchief that will heal you when you touch it. There is a city with a spring in southern France called Lourdes. There the virgin Mary appeared to a young girl in 1858. Her body is on display there and is said to be incorruptible because she drank the water, But...her face and hands are made of wax. Since that year 200,000,000 have gone to Lourdes and only 67 healings have been confirmed by the Catholic church. You have a 1 in 3,000,000 chance of a possible cure.

Not much has changed in two thousand years. Superstitions still abound and cures are rare and everyone dies. But...if you buy this oil, touch this cloth, drink this water and if you have enough of the right kind of faith...you can still be healed. If you are not there is always an explanation.

The sovereignty of Christ over our lives [6-9]

John 5:6-9 ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying *there*, and knew that he had already been a long time *in that condition*, He said to him, "Do you wish to get well?" ⁷ The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me." ⁸ Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk." ⁹ Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and *began* to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day.

When Jesus saw him lying *there*, and knew that he had already been a long time *in that condition*: You have to admire the persistence of a man who makes it to this pool everyday for 38 years and can never experience the right combination of stirring and access to the water in order to be healed. 38 years and no healing had occurred for this man. Our world is still full of people...millions of people, who give their money to

television healers, travel great distances to attend their meetings and go to Lourdes or other places to drink the water. The failure of any of these remedies is always laid at the feet of the sick. It is never the fault of the water, the cloth or the healer that promotes it. It is your fault. You lack faith. You are not strong enough. You have sin in your life. And of course...all those accusations are true of us all. BUT when Jesus appeared there by the pool, He said to the man, "Do you wish to get well?"

"Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me.": With these words the man reveals that He is thinking about the superstition of the water. He is certainly not expecting anything from Jesus. He has no idea who Jesus is and even after he is healed he does not know who Jesus is. His hope is in the angel, the water and some man to put him in at the exact moment so he can get the one available healing. What Jesus does is a little more powerful than that.

Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk.": Jesus does not ask him if he believes...it turns out that he does not. He does not tell him to forsake his sin...it turns out that he has sinned a lot...what a surprise.

Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day: Jesus just speaks the word and the man is able to walk...and carry his own bed. The Word of God is powerful. It is not like the word of mere men. It is synonymous with the power of God to act. He speaks and it comes to pass.

Psalm 33:4-9 ⁴ For the word of the LORD is upright, And all His work is *done* in faithfulness. ⁵ He loves righteousness and justice; The earth is full of the lovingkindness of the LORD. ⁶ By the Word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host. ⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deeps in storehouses. ⁸ Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. ⁹ For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.

Now it was the Sabbath on that day: This should be the best worship day ever. You are relaxing around the pool after going to Synagogue and along comes a man who has the power and authority to do what this stupid pool has not been able to do for nearly four decades. He speaks eight words to this man and his entire life changes in an instant. Everyone has seen a great display of the power of God to deliver men and of His supremacy over creation itself. This calls for rejoicing and celebration. For singing and dancing...right?

Well not so fast! It is the Sabbath and there won't be any of that going on on the Sabbath. In fact the entire revelation of Christ as the God of Creation and great Physician is entirely overlooked because of the Stupidity or dullness of those who esteem their own rules and religion above all else...even God Himself.

The stupidity of legalists and their religion [10-13]

John 5:10-13 ¹⁰ So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet." ¹¹ But he answered them, "He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Pick up your pallet and walk.'" ¹² They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up *your pallet* and walk '?" ¹³ But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in *that* place.

So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet.": They knew who this guy was. They knew he had not walked for 38 years. They could see he was not only walking but also carrying the pallet that was brought to lay him on every day. Their response is to criticize him and condemn him for breaking their Sabbath.

Now it is true that the old testament said, not to carry a load from your house to the city gate on the Sabbath, but in a context of doing your everyday work. God wanted men to take a day to rest from making a living and rejoice in actually living. Why did he have to command them? Because they would not do it otherwise. Life was a continual, everyday struggle to eat and live. For one day they were to trust the Lord and remember that God made, owns and sustains everything. You can just enjoy your life for this one day a week.

But not with these guys. They had created 39 more things that were prohibited to do on the Sabbath. Rather than rest and enjoy you were living in constant danger of violating some religious taboo about what you could or could not do on the Sabbath.

They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up *your pallet* and walk '?": They demand to know who gave him permission or even commanded him to break their Sabbath. But he had no idea. He did not believe in Jesus. He did not know Jesus. He had apparently never heard of Jesus. All he knew was that he was able to walk and...not having walked in 38 years he was anxious to try out his new legs. He did what he was told and unlike the blind man we will meet in Chapter nine, this guy is eager to pass the blame for Sabbath breaking on to someone else. He blames the man who healed him but....

But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in *that* place.

Jesus confronted these guys again and again throughout His ministry. He could have picked any day to heal this man and it would not have mattered at all to have waited until the next day or even until sundown on the Sabbath, but He does it now and right in front of them. Why? Because they were justified in their own eyes and by their own rules. They loved themselves and not God and certainly not other men who they compared themselves favorably with. They were self-righteous and always ready to find fault with anyone at any time.

More importantly is this. Their Sabbath was not the one that God had given to the Jews. It was a perversion of it. And it is a colossal arrogance to try to be holier and more righteous than God Himself. We have some of this mentality lurking in the church in our

day. God forbids drunkenness, but we can do better than God's standard! We will forbid drinking anything at all. God requires modesty, but we can do better than that. We will wear dowdy and unstylish clothing and hair.

Ultimately Jesus is setting the stage for what He promised to do in Matthew.

Matthew 5:17 ¹⁷ "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

Like every other part of the Law, only Jesus kept the Sabbath perfectly. He finished His work of new creation and was buried on three hours before Sabbath began. He rested from that work the entire Sabbath day and then rose from the dead early on the morning of the first day.

He paid no attention to the petty religion with which the Jews had overlaid the Sabbath. That He defied and denied. It drove them to murderous rage. When Jesus was not just defying them He was denouncing them for it.

Matthew 23:4 ⁴ "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with *so much as* a finger.

Matthew 23:13 ¹³ "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

The sympathy of Christ for sinners [14-15]

John 5:14-15 ¹⁴ Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you." ¹⁵ The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

So the man is faithless in the sense that Faith Healers require. Nevertheless, Jesus picks him from the multitude, determines that he has no hope or expectation of every being healed and then, without requiring anything from the man, he speaks and the man is healed. No theatrics, no religion, no works, no faith. This is the power of Christ displayed. This is God at work rather than a professed healer who blames all his failures on someone else...usually the sick, weak and broken person who came for help.

Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.": BUT...there is something else going on here that needs our attention. Jesus seeks him out in the crowd and instructs him and us as well. What he says sends a little bit of a chill up our spine as well. Is Jesus saying that all of our sicknesses come because we have committed some sin? To answer that we need to look at some verses together.

Romans 3:9-10 ⁹ What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; ¹⁰ as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

Romans 3:23 ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Now if the above proposition is true...”men are sick or infirmed because they sin”...then every man should be sick and infirmed all the time. Only the self-righteous or the people they have intimidated would think that. Paul under inspiration also said,

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 ⁷ Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me-- to keep me from exalting myself! ⁸ Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. ⁹ And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

He learned from God that sickness has purpose and meaning. It keeps us humble and praying to God. It reminds us of our weakness and dependency on God. Jesus was not teaching that all sickness comes from sin, but he does not rule out the idea that some sickness can come from sin. God has been known to afflict people to bring them down from their pride and gain their repentance.

David suffered illness after his sin with Bathsheba:

Psalms 32:3-5 ³ When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away *as with the fever heat of summer*. Selah. ⁵ I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.

Paul warned the Corinthians about flippant and irreverent behavior toward the church while celebrating communion.

1 Corinthians 11:30-31 ³⁰ For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.

The Jews taught that poverty, sickness and disability were all proof of hidden sin. This belief was pervasive. Even the disciples believed it without question.

John 9:1-4 As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. ² And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" [they did not even acknowledge the possibility that the blindness was not from sin] ³ Jesus

answered, "*It was* neither *that* this man sinned, nor his parents; but *it was* so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ "We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work.

The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well: So after all this gracious and merciful healing this unbelieving man runs strait to the Jews and gives them the name of the man who is to blame for his healing and subsequent violation of the Sabbath. WOW! What kind of gratitude is this? What a contrast to the blind man who said to the same brood of viper when they had confronted him for the audacity to be healed of his blindness:

John 9:24-28 ²⁴they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵ He then answered, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶ So they said to him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" ²⁷ He answered them, "I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear *it* again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?" ²⁸ They reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.

CONCLUSION: Jesus is merciful to sinners. He came for sinners and bypassed the self-righteous because....as He put it.....

Mark 2:17 "*It is* not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Whether this man ever trusted Christ is not revealed. What is revealed is that Christ cares for sinners and shows them a common grace that runs throughout the entire world. Pagans and religionists alike are given a physical life to live that is not snuffed out when they sin against God. We are all given food, clothing, varying degrees of joy and love and peace. Nothing is asked in return or required before this kindness is granted.

Christ came calling sinners. He takes the place of sinners in judgment pays their penalty. Our part is faith or trust. If you are a sinner, don't purpose to reform yourself or to become good enough for Christ to accept. Come as a sinner to the one who saves sinners. He can transform you....and He will....

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 ³ Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.