

Text: John 5:1-18

Title: "A Deeper Healing"

Time: 3/15/20 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Some of you may know that I was at a pastors' fellowship this past week in PA. It has been an eventful week, has it not? I will just mention two remarkable changes that I experienced in the course of those four days. On my way to the meetings on Monday, my son was a happy student in the dorms of Bob Jones University, and I was a happy UConn and Wisconsin college basketball fan looking forward to conference tournaments and March Madness. By the time I was returning home on Thursday from those meetings, my son's college was shutting down and March Madness has been canceled, all due, of course, to Coronavirus precautions. Again, it has been an eventful week.

Whatever we may think about the politics of all this, I believe that as believers we need to recognize the fact that we live in a world that is afraid to get sick and die, and that we have good news for them. The Scriptures tell us this fear is real for a reason, and that this is the reason Christ came to earth, died on the cross, and rose again from the grave: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, [Jesus] also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14-15).

As those who are no longer subject to the bondage of the fear of death, what should be our response to the Coronavirus or the other forms of physical suffering that we face? I

believe our passage this morning does a wonderful job instructing us about the answer to this question.

I have titled the message this morning, “A Deeper Healing,” and I have done so by borrowing this title from a talk that Joni Eareckson Tada gives from time to time. Joni became a quadriplegic after a diving accident at the age of 17. I listened to a talk she gave about that difficult suffering in 2014. By that time, she had been unable to walk for 46 years, 8 years longer than the lame man of our passage.

In addition to her paralysis, Joni has known the experience of constant and chronic pain, and recently she has also been through a difficult cancer battle. Yet through all this suffering, this sister speaks about a deeper healing she has known. She uses John 5 to talk about this.

The deeper healing Joni found in chapter 5 comes from two truths that Jesus desired this lame man at the Pool of Bethesda to grasp. These will be our focus this morning from the passage.

I. Jesus has compassion for our suffering (vv. 1-8).

Illustration: One of the objections critics once had to the pool described in our passage is the description of its five porticos or porches. Five-sided or pentagon pools are unknown to Jerusalem archeology, and so critics believed that this passage was evidence that the Gospel of John was written long after the first century by someone who was unfamiliar with Jerusalem.

As you might guess, I am mentioning that because it turns out that archaeologists did find the Pool of Bethesda in the 19th century, and they came more recently to understand

the five-portico description too. This pool is a rectangle with a portico on each of its four sides, but it is divided in half by a fifth portico, so the pool is comprised of two separate basins, that are indeed accessed through five different porticos. The Apostle John knew exactly what pool he was talking about when he wrote this chapter.

More recently, a copper scroll was found in the caves of Qumran – part of the Dead Sea Scroll collection – that dates to between 25 and 75 A.D., and that scroll refers to the Pool of Bethesda. Again, John understood which place he was writing about. We need to be willing to wait for more evidence at times when critics are putting forth their proposals for denying the truth of Scripture.

Application: But John did not write this passage to tell us about a place called *Bethesda* or about the five-portico pool located there. He wrote this passage to tell us about the Lord's miraculous healing of a man who had been crippled for thirty-eight years. What we see here is that Jesus cared for the man's condition with great compassion.

Illustration: I spoke on this passage recently at a chapel service of Trinity Christian School. In fact, the passage was assigned to me by the school. The Tuesday before that chapel service, I was visiting with Betty, Kathy, and David at Catholic Medical Center. The thought came to me to ask Betty for a message that I could give to these scores of teenagers the next day.

She thought just briefly, and then she said, "Tell them that they never have anything to fear if they only would realize just how much Jesus loves them." Betty has been endeavoring to live by those words through some very difficult

weeks. Her suggestion came from personal experience. She knows the compassion of the Jesus of this passage.

Application: We see this love in Jesus's question to the lame man – "Do you want to be healthy?" (v. 6). Jesus could see, know, and say in a way no one this man had ever met before could. Of course, the answer of the man who had been lame for 38 years was "Yes." In healing this man's suffering, Jesus showed him and us His compassion for those who are suffering. Just like Betty said, "When we suffer, we need not fear, because Jesus loves us."

In this passage that love of Christ for those who are suffering is contrasted with the angel who stirs the waters and the Pharisees who complained that it was done on the sabbath. The angel would appear, stir the water, disappear, and only the first one into the water afterwards would be healed. We are not told of any angelic compassion here.

The Pharisees, of course, were even worse. They healed no one, and if you healed someone on the sabbath, they were going to try to kill you. Clearly, we can see how Jesus's compassion is far greater than the angel's or the Pharisees' for these people.

But perhaps there is another contrast we need to consider this morning. In what way does Jesus's compassion for people who are suffering contrast our own hearts and lives? Have we asked anyone recently the question, "Do you want to be healed?" For us, that question has to be more like, "Can I pray for your healing?" Perhaps there is some yard work you can do; perhaps an encouraging text from Scripture you can read; perhaps a meal you can make for someone who is suffering. Do we see and know and say things with compassion like our Lord?

You and I cannot do the healing Jesus does in this passage; nor can we even do the healing the angel had been doing. But we can have Jesus's compassion in a way neither the angel nor the Pharisees could.

Let's commit ourselves to be expressions of that compassion for the suffering in these uncertain days of difficulty. The Coronavirus is a great opportunity for gospel compassion. The fear of death is the devil's bondage, but Jesus died to free us from that bondage. That is our gospel message, which people need to hear from us in these times. Jesus has compassion for our suffering.

II. Jesus has concern for something more important than our suffering (vv. 9-14).

Illustration: This past week I had the wonderful privilege of meeting Paul and Tabitha Norris. Tabitha is the daughter of Alan and Kathy Brown. Kathy is the cousin of Bryan Henderson, for whose cancer battle we have been praying for some time. After a lifetime of paralysis related to a debilitating childhood disease, Tabitha now has been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. She gave a talk at our pastors' meeting that was not unlike the one I heard from Joni.

Both ladies testify that in the middle of their uncured and intense physical suffering, God has done a work of joy in their spirit that they would not trade for the physical healing their bodies have needed and done without. That is what Joni has called "a deeper healing." Tabitha said God had given her that joy too.

Application: This deeper healing is the ability for our spirit to become more like Christ through suffering. In our passage, Jesus gives a man the physical ability to walk, and in so doing warns him about a deeper sickness, blindness, or

paralysis that could come to him in spite of the fact that this suffering has been healed. That warning is in verse 14.

Jesus tells the man to not continue in sin, because if he did, something worse than not being able to walk for 38 years would happen to him. What is worse than not being able to walk for 46 years? Joni explained what was worse. She said not knowing, trusting, loving, imitating, and serving Jesus Christ is worse than not being able to walk for 46 years. Sin and its consequences are far worse than the sufferings of this life.

III. Jesus suffered to end our suffering and our sin (vv. 15-18).

Application: The hatred for Christ expressed in these verses escalates until it achieves His crucifixion on the cross. Jesus died to free us from our sins and its consequences. We must hear His command to continue in our sin of unbelief no longer, to believe on Him as God's Son who died for us and rose again, and to follow Him.

Conclusion: The book of the Bible I studied with those pastors and other brothers in Christ in PA this past week is the NT book of James. James is addressed to Jewish Christians, who had been scattered abroad by the persecutions of Acts 8. They had lost their homes, their businesses, their place of employment. Perhaps as refugees some were even experiencing the loss of family or their health. The Jerusalem church, which James pastored, was experiencing the loss of many of its members.

All this was suffering of a different kind. It was not physical bodily suffering like we see in John 5, but it was the suffering of the body of Christ, which had become injured, scat-

tered, and somewhat weakened by sin from without and within. Every local church knows some of this suffering.

Not surprisingly, James begins his letter to them talking about suffering and the need to find the joy that Joni and Tabitha have found in the middle of even that kind of suffering (Jam. 1:1-5). Whatever is trying our faith, we must count it all joy. We often do not know how to do that, and so we must ask for wisdom (v. 5).

Illustration: Another testimony time this past week was a session on Monday night in which Pastor Jeff Briden from NJ spoke of the difficult and debilitating condition of his once healthy young son. Intense chronic pain has been an incurably persistent problem for this son, and Jeff and his wife have aged as they have tried to care for Jared. Pastor Briden gave the testimony of what they had been through after our study of this first chapter of James, and he mentioned what a blessing the Psalms of lament had been to him during these days.

It occurred to me that this James 5 prayer for wisdom in the middle of trials often sounds like a prayer of lament. I want to close this morning by having us turn to one of those so we can know how this prayer sounds at times (Psalm 13).

I read a book recently that pointed out that anyone can cry over suffering. We come out of the womb crying. But only believers can lament while suffering, because a lament is turning our crying to the Lord.

As we do that, eventually we bump into the “But” of verse 5, the turning point of a deeper healing process that eventually results in a stronger, more single-minded faith, a faith that concludes in spite of our circumstances of suffering:

“My heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me.” That is the wisdom of a deeper healing in times of suffering, which James promises is ours for the asking. Let’s pray such a prayer in these days of trials and suffering.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*