

Do You Want to Get Well?

¹Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. ²Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³Here a great number of disabled people used to lie – the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. ⁵ One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶When 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?”

⁷“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.”

⁸Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” ⁹At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. – John 5:1-9a

We do not know which “feast of the Jews” brought Jesus to Jerusalem. He came to town for all the annual feasts. A local legend claimed that when an angel came down and stirred the waters of Bethesda, the first disabled person in the pool would receive a healing. However, Jesus came to enact a healing that could not be attributed to anything beyond the power of His spoken word. Whenever John recorded one of Jesus’ mighty wonders, he always had in mind some conspicuous spiritual lesson. There is a profound connection between this isolated healing and the larger matter of deliverance from sin that Jesus brings to whoever will receive it.

Jesus was drawn to the most pitiful figure at the pool, a man who has been an “invalid” (literally, without strength) for 38 years. He lacked the physical strength to move himself quickly enough to beat others into the water when it moved, and he lacked anyone to assist him in doing so. Deliverance for this man required steps that he could not take for himself. He lacked the strength to be healed. He lacked a champion to assist him. That was true of our need for salvation from sin. We were powerless to save ourselves. We had no one to come to our aid. Later, Paul wrote about our helpless state:

⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:6-8

Jesus asked a strange question, “Do you want to get well?” After 38 years, perhaps hanging around the pool had become an empty act, simply the way he had grown accustomed to killing his long, uneventful days. Maybe, he had forgotten how to really consider a life of health and wholeness. Jesus probed his desire. A new life would mean new responsibilities. It would mean standing on his own two feet and being answerable for his life. “Do you want to get well?” implies an appeal to a will that was as paralyzed as the man’s body.

When Jesus called people to Himself, He was very honest with them. He told them the new life would mean crosses, sacrifices and even persecution. Such rhetoric is soft-peddled on many fronts in modern Christendom, because too many times and in too many places, the success of the Gospel is measured by the number of people in a crowd rather than by the depth of discipleship. Many mask “the cost of discipleship” which might alternately be referred to as “the demands of wellness.”

Are you ready to stop living your life in the pursuit of frivolities? Are you ready to abandon the shallow vanity of your own self-centeredness? Are you ready to face the utter emptiness of a life that revolves around pleasure and the acquisition of things but cannot powerfully sense the presence of God? Are the responsibilities of walking with Christ worth abandoning that which is familiar and undemanding? *“Do you want to get well?”*

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