



# Walking with Jesus

## PEOPLE IN NEED

Nehemiah 13:15-22; John 5:1–16 (Bob Nance)

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Life can be very difficult at times and I am sure none of us can say we have never struggled with an issue that caused us to wonder how we are going to get through it, especially one of a medical nature.

But we live in an age where medical science has progressed to such a point that many of the conditions that would have resulted in death are now able to be cured, particularly after the discovery of the antibiotic Penicillin. The accounts where Jesus healed a person of a disease or infirmity were so spectacular that the people who witnessed them were so astounded, they couldn't help but talk about them to others.

In today's reading, we find that Jesus has travelled up to Jerusalem to attend a feast, which was a requirement for all Jewish men. This entailed staying over a weekend which included a Sabbath day.

Now, in our reading from Nehemiah, we see that there was a problem in regards to the observance of the Sabbath in his day. Nehemiah had come back to Jerusalem with the specific purpose of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. They were destroyed by king Nebuchadnezzar in the year 586 BC and had remained broken down ever since. In the year 538 BC some exiles returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the altar and Temple to their God which was completed in 516 BC but the walls were yet to be built.

In 445 BC, some 71 years later, Nehemiah came back with the third group of exiles, and with prayer, encouragement, guard duty and allocating groups of people to specific areas of the wall, it was completed in 52 days. But the people had wandered from following their God and commerce had flourished to such a level, that for many, the Sabbath was just like any other day. Nehemiah took a stand against this practice and reminded the people of the need to place God in the centre of their Sabbath and worship Him only.

Consequently, over the years, those charged with ensuring that the Sabbath was observed in a holy manner, had introduced many laws which included not working on the Sabbath, and defining what constituted work. This was the situation in Jesus's day, and He had already run foul of the authorities on a previous visit to Jerusalem, regarding the Sabbath regulations and traditions, and was aware that they were challenging His authority after He overturned the money changers and those who were selling animals for sacrifice in the temple.

While in Jerusalem this time, He visited the pool of Bethesda where all sorts of invalid people were surrounding it. There were blind, deaf, lame and paralyzed people, all waiting for the same thing to happen, for the miracle of the waters to be disturbed.

When Jesus arrived at the pool, He was faced with a dilemma. Being a compassionate person, His heart went out to all the people surrounding the pool and I'm sure He would have wanted to heal all of them, as each and every one of them had a desperate need to be healed, and it was the Sabbath day.

We are not told if Jesus healed any others, but we are told that He chose a man who had been an invalid for thirty eight years and had been trying to get into the waters when it was stirred, but someone always beat him to it. We are not told if he was brought to the pool each day by friends or if that was where he stayed 24/7, but whatever his situation, he was the one Jesus spoke to, and when He did, Jesus asked a very interesting question.

The question was, **"Do you want to get well?"** Have you ever wondered why Jesus asked him if he wanted to "get well"? At first glance, this seems to be a very silly question as this man had been sitting at the pool waiting for the waters to be troubled for 38 years – a very long time. But I think we know that Jesus never asked a silly question. So why did He ask it?

If the man said "yes" then this was going to be a life changing experience in many ways. Let's look at his current situation again. This existence was normality for him. He had been at the pool for thirty-eight years and during that time he had been able to exist by begging for food, so he was obviously good at it as he was still alive after all this time. Therefore, we could say that begging was his livelihood. He was used to his situation and all those who were around him, and had probably made many friends amongst them, because they, too, had disabilities and were waiting for the opportunity to jump into the water if possible. So if he said "yes" then he would no longer mix with these people and consequently, he would lose many of his friends.

As he had been there so long now, this was just his normal routine with very little happening from day to day. But if he was healed, he wouldn't be able to beg for his existence, he would have to go out and work and what skills did he have? Very little if any, so this was an extremely pertinent question. So, by asking this question, Jesus was asking the man did he **REALLY** want things to change or was he content to let things stay as they were.

As Christians, we too can find ourselves in situations where God is asking us "do we want to stay as we are or do we want to allow Him to transform us into His image". In Romans 12 verse 2 it says " Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your spirit"

It's easy to just coast along in the knowledge that we have been redeemed and that our life is hidden in Christ. But it may be God's will for us to step out into new ministries and new adventures which can be scary and yet really exciting. This may involve some new and radical changes, and require skills we don't think we have, but with God's help, He will enable us to achieve the result He wants. Paul said "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" ( Philippians 4:13). All things are possible when Christ is in control.

Jesus question caused the man to seriously examine his situation and the consequences of being healed. He knew that he was powerless to change his situation and yet he was very aware of his desperate need for things to change. There was probably a note of hopelessness in the man's voice as he replied to Jesus, "Sir, I have no one to put me in the pool".

He obviously had seen other people get up and jump into the pool and be healed, while he struggled to do the same. Although those around him were his friends, when it came to the crunch, it was every man for himself. He knew he needed someone to help him get to the water if he was to be healed. He, in himself, could not change anything.

So, too, in our spiritual life, we are helpless to change those things that need to be changed. All of us are "slaves" because we have all sinned. Jesus said "Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin"(John 8 : 34) No one can turn their life around on their own. As the man was powerless to help himself so, too, we are powerless to overcome our sin in our own strength.

I'm sure the man was absolutely blown away by what happened next. He became the object of an unsolicited miracle! He, who had no quality of life, no power to change and no expectations for the future, is simply told to get up, pick up his mat and to walk. In that very instant, he was cured. Strength came back into his muscles and bones and he was able to do as he was told.

This is a picture of a person being confronted by the gospel and being told to believe in the Lord Jesus to be saved. Countless lives have been miraculously turned around in an instant upon hearing and responding to that call. The natural helplessness that is ours is overcome by the invincible and irresistible power that is Christ's and our lives are changed forever.

The man then went to the temple to show himself to the priests as was the law, and there he was questioned by the Jewish Leaders. They were not in the least bit interested in the fact that a miracle had been performed, they could only see that this man was breaking the law by carrying his mat, a law that was not decreed by God, but was only a tradition. This was the Sabbath and he was not allowed to do this. His defense was "the Man who made me well said to me "pick up your mat and walk"

So they further questioned him and asked "who healed you?" His answer was simply "I don't know" because, you see, Jesus had moved off into the crowd after He healed the man.

Later, because Jesus knows all things, He knew what had happened to him and where he was. So Jesus went and found him and said to him "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you" Jesus was not necessarily implying that this man's condition was the result of some particular sin in his life. That may well have been the case, but we are not required to see it that way. Rather, Jesus is making the connection between sickness in general and sin in particular. We live in a world where things go wrong and suffering abounds because it is a world in which there is sin. He was making it clear to the man (and also to all who read this account) that the greatest need in life is not merely to have bodies that are healthy, but souls that are at peace with God. The "Something worse" of which Jesus spoke was the eternal consequence of sin: the irreversible judgement of God.

Only when sin has been dealt with by the miracle of Christ's saving grace can we truly and lastingly experience the "healing" we need most of all- that is, the healing of our souls. Only then can we find the rest that He desires for each and every one of us.

In Matthew 11:28, 29 it says "Come to Me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls". The transformation that comes from a soul set free is the most liberating experience that can happen to a person and bring so much joy into their life

After Jesus spoke to him, the man returned to the Jews at the temple and told them it was Jesus who had made him well. This was like a red rag to a bull to the Jews who then fronted Jesus about His breaking their Sabbath Laws and intensified their persecution of Him.

In response to their reaction regarding the Sabbath laws, Jesus spoke to them of His relationship with His Father, God. This further infuriated the Jews, who now not only persecuted Him, but plotted to murder Him.

This man chose to side with the Jewish leaders when he went and told them who had healed him. Unlike Bartimaeus, who, when he was healed and given his sight, chose to follow Jesus. Both of these men's lives were changed forever and they were never the same again, but they had to allow Jesus to work in their lives to change them, and give them hope for the future.

Are we ready to let God continue to change our lives and reflect the love of Christ, and become involved in reaching out to others as God leads? If we are, then we need to be open to His command and to obey as the lame man did and we too will experience the power of God working in us.