

Three Lessons Taught At Bethesda.

Text: John 5:1-14

1) Sin is the cause of illness

Suggested Hymns:

2) Jesus does not ignore our suffering

400, 164, 452, 388, 437

3) The answer to why

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 5:1-14, ¹ *After this 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 porches.*

³ *In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. ⁴ For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.*

⁵ *Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made 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, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." ⁹ And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath. ¹⁰ The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed." ¹¹ He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'"¹² Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" ¹³ But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. ¹⁴ Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we shall accompany our Lord Jesus on a visit to the City Hospital of Jerusalem. It is the year 32. The place to which we go will astonish us. It is not a hospital at all as we know it. Probably in only two respects will we find points of similarity. First, we are faced by **“a great multitude of sick people,”** row upon row of suffering humanity, the blind, the lame, the withered, the infirm, the paralysed. Second, everyone of that multitude hopes for healing of bodily ills.

Most hospitals have a name. The one we are visiting is called Bethesda, which means *House of Mercy*. There were five porches, which constituted the building, which had been built around the pool of the same name.

But here are no white-garbed physicians, no sympathetic, efficient nurses, no clinical appliances, and no drugs to relieve and heal. All eyes are fixed in anxious anticipation on the pool itself. All the sick people are waiting with fear and trembling for the movement, the bubbling up of the water in the pool.

The phenomenon is attributed to the fact that an angel at a certain time came down to the pool and disturbed the water. And the first sick person who entered the water after the phenomenon had taken place became well, no matter with what sickness he was afflicted.

Even an angel from heaven has limited powers. In this case the limitation was that a person could only be healed at each movement of the waters.

As we walk among the misery-laden beds and pallets, we see the Saviour stoop over a wasted, weary, withered form. His tender, soothing voice reaches the ear of the sufferer, **“Do you want to be made well?”** The sick man does not realise who is speaking. Wearily he explains, as he has no doubt done so often before, *“Naturally, I want to be healed, but there is little hope of that. In my condition I cannot get to the steps that lead to the water fast enough. Every time the water bubbles up, either someone else steps ahead of me, or some friend or relative carries someone down before me. I have no one to help me.”*

And then Jesus whose mighty power is never bound, and who is Friend and Brother to all people, simply says, **“Rise, take up your bed and walk.”** And indeed it was so.

As we stand and watch this scene, thoughts of many kinds throng in upon us. So today let us consider only three of the lessons that are taught here. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Sin Is The Cause Of Illness

When Jesus had healed the man, He quietly disappeared in the crowd. Jesus still had something to say to the man, but felt that it would be better to say it at another time. It was best to wait until after the first surge of tremendous emotion at being healed had passed, when the crowd would no longer be shouting, and when the disapproving looks of the hypocritical Pharisees would be absent.

Jesus manages to meet him at the Temple and gives him this message, "*See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.*" Jesus calls attention to the fact that there is a relationship between sin and the ills of man's body.

Whether we walk through the wards of an institution, where the results of degenerate living and improper living are so clearly obvious, or whether we sit at the bedside of some God-fearing mother, the cause of sickness and illness and pain and suffering of the body is always sin.

This does not mean that every illness can be traced to a specific sin. Jesus does not tell the man of our text, "*Thirty-eight years ago you committed a certain sin. As a result of that sin you became the sick man you were before I healed you.*"

The Lord is simply emphasising the sickness and all physical ills would never have come into the world at all if sin had not come first. When He created the world, God gave man a perfect body. That perfection was marred by the introduction of sin into the life of man. Sin generates sicknesses and ills and pains and, finally, death of the body.

It is natural to ask, "*Why did God punish sin with sickness and infirmity?*" Let us, at the outset, remember that it is not a petty, peevish "getting even" on the part of God. God knew man's pride. He knew how difficult it would be with mere words to make man realise and understand the magnitude and the horror and the heinousness of sin.

One of the first steps toward really knowing God is to feel the need of a Saviour from sin, but only the person who knows sin itself and its power, will realise the abomination of sin in itself, and will also recognise the need of a Saviour from such abomination.

Even the most prejudiced person will admit that God, in His wisdom, most effectively makes man conscious of sin by its consequences. When God sends sickness, He says, *“Remember that there is sin in the world. Remember that you are a sinner. Remember that sins must be forgiven.”*

Jesus tells the man who had been healed, *lest a worse thing come upon you.* Many people think that when a severe and long illness comes upon them that *“Nothing could be worse.”* They are wrong. There is something far worse — eternal suffering in hell. To save us from that, there is no Helper but Jesus. Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the Great Physician who can prevent eternal death. His medicine is simple, to accept His atonement for our sins in faith.

2. Jesus Does Not Ignore Our Sufferings

Our visit to Bethesda Hospital also teaches us that Jesus does not simply disregard our sufferings. He knows and emphasises that the worst thing that can happen is to have the sinner suffer eternally. But He does not say, *“For this reason I will forget about the temporal sufferings of men.”* Jesus did not call those people who waited so anxiously about the Bethesda pool, “fools.” No, He fully understood and sympathised with their desire to be healed also in body. In all of God’s planning for sinful man He manifests His love.

And so He has provided many glorious gifts of nature for healing the body, curing disease, and alleviating pain. To help mankind has always been the intent of God. Man’s sin-engendered ignorance has often kept many of these gifts from being used.

We hear daily of the medical marvels of both modern medicine and ancient and alternative medicine. God expects us to use these gifts of His for our bodily easement and physical well-being. How silly, in view of this, is the doctrine of some religious sects to say that it is wrong to use such gifts of God. It is in effect telling God, *“We do not want Your gifts.”* A true Christian will gladly, gratefully, use such means as God has given to lighten the crosses of life and alleviate the painful consequences of sin.

At Bethesda's pool "*God sent an angel to stir up the water*" and give it healing powers, God does not necessarily send an angel to put drugs or penicillin into a bottle for us, or to guide the surgeon's knife during an operation.

But He does, in His love for man, provide many natural means to serve us. However, all of these have their limitations. No matter how often the angel came to Bethesda, the 38-year sufferer of our text was always excluded from those healed, because of circumstances. He could not walk to the steps himself. He had no relatives to carry him.

But in the end he was healed just the same, for Jesus is not limited in His ministrations to man's needs as was the angel, as are the natural agencies, as is man's ability. One word from Jesus, and this man who had borne the cross of his infirmity for thirty-eight years was a well man. That unlimited power of Jesus is still efficacious today. Surely, we will utilise every means that science can devise to cure and alleviate sickness and infirmity, always remembering that a living God first put these powers into His created world.

When circumstances limit us, however, we know that we can still go to Jesus and say, "*I wish to be healed,*" and know that His unlimited, almighty power can help us.

3. The Answer To Why

One more lesson in this connection is necessary. Why did Jesus pick just that one man out of the multitude? There must have been many more people there who were in as bad a condition or worse. Why pick out only one man when the whole multitude was suffering? These and similar questions inevitably come to us as we see the sick, the lame, the blind, and the paralysed today.

According to human reason so many of these questions do not find an answer. The same surgeon performs the same operation on two different people. One is cured, the other is not, or even gets worse. An old, immoral man is badly burned in a car accident of his own reckless conduct and in a few weeks has made a full recovery.

A young Christian nurse rushes into a burning building to save a baby's life and is made an invalid for life. Why? How the mind travels the weary treadmill of the "why" when we only look upon life from the worm-eye view of human reason.

Yet there are answers to all the questions of life and of living, answers that are right, sure, divinely logical, and supremely loving. Only the exalted view of God from the height of His omniscience and the pinnacle of His mercy can give those answers.

Sometimes, after many weary days, He permits us a glimpse of this. Then we can say, *“Now I know why God gave me this to bear or that to suffer.”*

More often He expects us to know the answers from the clear and shining revelation of His will as we find it in the Scriptures. For instance, an answer to just such troubling questions is found in the word of Jesus, written in John 15:2, *Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*

Next time one of these matters worries you, remember the Lord’s word given by His Apostle in 1 Corinthians 11:32, ³² *But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.* To all who are worried about such matters God gives answer after answer.

Every Christian who asks these “whys” should sit down in some quiet corner and read prayerfully and with personal application the words of the Book of Hebrews,¹ *“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; ⁶ For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.”*

⁷ *If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.*

⁹ *Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.*

¹¹ *Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

And so our visit with Jesus to the Bethesda Hospital in Jerusalem comes to an end. God grant that it has been for us not only an interesting experience of the

moment, but that we have learned to view ourselves as humble sinners, who so greatly need a Saviour.

God grant that we have recognised in Jesus of Nazareth the One who alone can take away our sins and help us to overcome or bear sins' consequences in our lives. God grant that we always remember that Jesus loves us and that all His doings in our lives stem from that love.

Then we will be able, not only to sing, but to believe with all our heart,²

Well He knows how best to grant me

All the longing hopes that haunt me;

Joy and sorrow have their day.

I shall doubt His wisdom never;

As God wills, so be it ever:

I to Him commit my way. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Hebrews 12:5-11

² Hymn 388