

Main Idea: In John 5:1-15 Jesus demonstrated His authority over two great problems that plague the human race.

- I. Scene one: Jesus healed a disabled body (1-9).
 - A. He went to Jerusalem (1-3).
 1. He did so to fulfill the Law (1).
 2. He did so because there were needy people there (2-3).
 - B. He made contact with an invalid (5-7).
 1. See His compassion.
 2. See His sovereignty.
 - C. He made a broken body healthy again (8-9).
 1. He revealed His authority over the man.
 2. He revealed His authority over disease.
 3. He revealed His authority over the Sabbath.
- II. Scene two: Jesus exposed the disability of the soul (10-15).
 - A. The Jews rebuked the healed man (10).
 - B. The healed man defended himself (11-13).
 - C. Jesus warned the healed man that he was in serious danger (14).
 1. Our biggest problem isn't physical.
 2. Our biggest problem is our sin.
 - D. The healed man left Jesus (15).

Make it personal: What have you done with Jesus?

1. He cares about your physical problems.
2. He cares even more about your sin problem.
3. He is willing to offend you so you'll admit the truth about yourself and Him.

What do you think of when you hear the word *disabled*? I think of Aunt Edie. She was one of my grandmother's younger sisters. When Edie was only five years old or so she contracted what was at the time the potentially deadly disease of polio. By the grace of God and the love of her mother, she survived, but lived the rest of her seventy plus years of life with a twisted body. She never married. The Lord took her to heaven about ten years ago, but I can still see her in my mind's eye shuffling back and forth with limbs that refused to cooperate with her very strong will and keen mind.

Disabled. I think of Charlie, a leader in my home church. Charlie walked with crutches because he lost a leg in a hunting accident. Ironically he flew multiple bombing missions over Europe during World War II, survived each of those dangerous encounters, but lost his leg after the war when a friend accidentally discharged his shotgun into Charlie's leg as they were hunting in Ohio.

I think about Amy, a dear young lady in our community whose body has been immobilized by the terrible disease of cerebral palsy. Amy has come to our Counseling and Discipleship class the last two years. You might think she came to get some help for herself, but as she made it clear by her own testimony, "I'm taking these classes because there are so many disabled people in the world who need hope, and I want to get trained so I can help them." I praise God for Amy (and I wonder what the Lord thinks of my lame excuses for not helping more people).

And of course, I can't think of *disabled* without reflecting on our dear sister, Nancy Rae Litteral. Nancy was part of this church family for all of her seventy-one years of life. Back in 1954, just before she graduated from high school, a drunk driver hit her car and broke her neck, and she spent the next fifty three years in a wheelchair as a quadriplegic. Yet Nancy herself was known to say that disability does not mean inability. The Lord gave her the ability to paint by mouth, and her paintings blessed hundreds and resulted in

*** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

who knows how many thousands of dollars of financial support for missionaries and gospel-promoting ministries. In her own words, “My desire is to bring honor and glory to God through my art and life—to be a witness to others that with God’s help, no matter what the handicap or circumstances, one can still have a happy, satisfying, and meaningful life.”

This morning we’re going to look at what Jesus did with an unnamed disabled man we meet in John 5. To say that Jesus cares for the disabled is an understatement. He certainly does, as this account reveals. But this story reveals to us so much more than we might see at first glance.

Remember, the gospel writer, John the apostle, made it clear why he included the stories before us. He wrote in John 20:30, “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.” Before us is but one of the many miracles Jesus performed, and when John includes a miracle he has an agenda, a point he intends to make. There’s something he wants his readers to believe and receive, as he affirms in verse 31, “But these are written that you *may believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you *may have life* in his name.”

Notice those two purposes. May believe, and may have life. That’s the reason this story is included in your Bible. John included what we’re about to study so that we would believe something about Jesus and then receive something from Jesus.

Believe what? That He is the Christ. And receive what? Life.

You say, “But I’ve already got life, don’t I? I don’t need to believe in Christ, since I’ve already got life.” But you don’t have life, not the kind of life your Creator intended when He brought you into existence. You may have existence, but you don’t have life.

The fact is, there are two fundamental barriers to the kind of life your Maker intended for you, and He sent His Son to bring down those barriers. Let’s call them disabilities. First you have *physical disabilities*. The moment we enter this world our bodies start developing and simultaneously start breaking down and dying. We have never experienced the kind of physical life God intended when He created the human race. We are living in a sin-cursed world with sin-cursed bodies.

But the reason we have physical disabilities is linked to a second, more fundamental disability, a *disability of the soul*. To put it another way, the reason we merely exist rather than really living is because we enter the world with a soul problem. “The soul that sins shall die,” says God’s Word (Ezekiel 18:4).

That’s the bad news. You have physical problems, and you have a soul problem. Your body doesn’t work as God intended, nor does your soul. If you’re going to experience *life*, life that is abundant and eternal, then you need to fix those two problems.

But you can’t, can you?

Here’s the good news. God sent His Son into the world to do for you what you desperately need and cannot accomplish. Christ came to reverse the curse and fix those two problems.

Quite a claim, you say. *Prove it*. Okay, that’s precisely what John is doing in this biography. As an eyewitness, John is showing who Jesus is, demonstrating that He indeed can fix those two problems, and urging you to put your trust in Him.

That brings us to our story. In John 5 Jesus demonstrated His authority over the two great problems/disabilities that plague the human race. He did a miracle in verses 1-15, and then preached a sermon about the implications of that miracle in the rest of the chapter. We’re going to look at the miracle today and the sermon in future weeks. There are two scenes in the miracle account.

I. Scene one: Jesus healed a disabled body (1-9).

Verse 1 says, “Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews.” Notice what Jesus just did...

A. He went to Jerusalem (1-3). When? John says He went *some time later*. Let me set the timeline, borrowing from William Hendriksen.

As we read John chapters two and three, you discover that Jesus spent eight months or so in Jerusalem and Judea, teaching and healing the sick. Then in chapter four He went north into Samaria and spent two days. He arrived in Galilee in 4:45 where He healed the son of a royal official. So Jesus is in the Galilean phase of His ministry as chapter four ends, and He’s been there for about four months.

Then as chapter five begins, He makes a move. Again, verse 1 says, “Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews.” He’ll remain in Jerusalem for the rest of chapter five. Interestingly, if you look ahead to the beginning of chapter six, you’ll notice He’s back in Galilee but moves to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

I get the sense that Jesus didn’t stay long in Jerusalem in chapter five. Again, He hasn’t finished His Galilean phase yet, and will head back there in chapter six. So why interrupt His important ministry up north to make this quick trip to Jerusalem? Our text says He went there, on this occasion, “for a feast of the Jews.”

What feast? There were three yearly pilgrim feasts for the Jews (see Leviticus 23): Passover (mid-April), Pentecost (seven weeks later), and Tabernacles (in September). John here doesn’t specify, but simply says “a feast.”

Now why would Jesus go to all the effort to attend a feast in Jerusalem? It’s seventy-five miles or so from Galilee down to Jerusalem. He makes a several day investment of time and energy, plus takes time away from other ministry opportunities in Galilee, to go to Jerusalem. The question is *why*? And the answer is...

1. *He did so to fulfill the Law (1).* Jesus kept God’s Law. He said in Matthew 5:17, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

The Law stated that Jews were to observe certain feasts (see Deut. 16:16). And Jesus did just that as John points out throughout his gospel record. Here are some examples...

John 2:13 “When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.” And John 2:23, “Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast...”

John 7:2, 10—He went to the Feast of Tabernacles.

John 10:22 “Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple area...”

John 12:12 “The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast [Passover] heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.”

Barclay observes, “John always shows us Jesus attending the great feasts, for Jesus did not disregard the obligations of Jewish worship. To him it was not a duty but a delight to worship with his own people.”¹

Is Jesus’ obedience to God’s Law important? Absolutely. He’s fixing our disabilities. Why is there physical and spiritual death in the world? Because of our disobedience to God’s Law, right? Jesus is doing what we failed to do. He’s fulfilling the Law.

But there’s a more obvious reason He went to Jerusalem, one that John mentions.

2. *He did so because there were needy people there (2-3).* Notice verses 2-3, “Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called

¹ William Barclay, p. 177.

Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.”

John gives us some background in verse 2. He says, “There *is* in Jerusalem.” It’s present tense. The pool is still there, affirms John. Some say this means he is writing before AD 70 since that’s when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. I don’t think so. I think he wrote this account around 85 or so, but even then this pool is still there.

It’s by the Sheep Gate, says John, so named probably because that was the gate through which thousands of sheep had been led over the years to be sacrificed in the nearby temple court.²

There’s a pool there, says John. The Greek word for “pool” is *kolumbethron* from the verb that means “to dive.” Barclay says that shows the pool was deep enough to swim in, and points out that beneath this pool was a subterranean stream which every now and then bubbled up and disturbed the water.³

It’s called either *Bethesda*, which means “house of mercy,” or *Bethzatha*, as some manuscripts suggest, meaning “house of the olive.”

Around the pool were five covered porch areas. Under the shade of those porches and next to the pool were scores of disabled people. Some were blind. Some were lame (*cholos*, maimed, crippled). Some were paralyzed (*xeros*, dried up, withered, shrunken, shriveled). A sad sight, for sure. A host of people with broken down bodies just laying there, probably begging, and everyone of them waiting and hoping.

Hoping for what? For the water to stir, as one infirmed man shares in verse 7, and for the chance to be healed.

If you have a KJV or NKJV, your translation includes information that’s treated as a footnote in the NIV and ESV (which is why there’s no verse 4 in those translations). That’s because the oldest manuscripts don’t include the statement which was apparently added in later copies to provide background for the story. The statement reads, “*And they waited for the moving of the waters. From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease he had.*”

It’s worth noting that in 1888 this pool was explored in connection with the repair of the church of St. Anne in northeast Jerusalem. They found a faded fresco on the wall portraying an angel troubling the water.⁴

You say, “Did an angel actually come down and stir the water, and were people actually healed in this pool?” I don’t know. Wiersbe asks, “Why would anybody, especially a man sick for so many years, remain in one place if nothing special were occurring? You would think that after thirty-eight years of nothing happening to *anybody*, the man would go elsewhere and stop hoping!”⁵

Perhaps. But this we know. John is just telling us what happened (people came to this pool) and what people believed would happen (the first one in was healed). And regardless whether verse 4 is in the original text or not, verse 7 indicates this is what the invalids at the pool believed.

Do you see the hopelessness in this scene? Even if one person was healed every now and then, dozens are lying there, some for all their lives, hoping against hope. It’s

² Hendriksen, p. 189.

³ Barclay, p. 178.

⁴ Hendriksen, p. 190.

⁵ Wiersbe, p. 304.

interesting that Augustine interprets this passage allegorically, and sees the five porches as referring to the five books of Moses, utterly unable to bring healing.⁶

At this point in the story John moves from the panoramic view of the pool, turns on the telephoto lens, and shows us what Jesus did with one particular invalid.

B. He made contact with an invalid (5-7). Notice verse 5, “One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.” We’re not told his specific malady. Perhaps he was paralyzed. For sure he was too weak to move himself quickly. He’s just lying there trapped inside a dead-weight body that’s been his prison for thirty-eight years.

Verse 6—“When 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?’”

Look at Jesus, my friend. John emphasizes two of His attributes here. First...

1. *See His compassion.* Jesus saw the infirmed man. There may be a multitude of disabled people by this pool, but Jesus sees the individual. And He makes contact with the individual, and asks, “Do you want to get well?”

That’s a peculiar question. Sure he would want to get well, wouldn’t he? What disabled man wouldn’t? Is Jesus just making small talk? No, it’s not small talk. If Jesus asks a question, He’s always got a good purpose for it.

Might the disabled man *not* want to be made well? Think for a moment how life will change for this man if he loses his disability. If he’s made well, he’s no longer going to stay on a mat and beg for his living. He’s going to have to work and earn his bread. Does he want that responsibility?

I read that an eastern beggar might lose a decent living if he was cured of his disease.⁷ Barclay points out, “There are invalids for whom invalidism is not unpleasant, because someone else does all the working and all the worrying.”⁸

I don’t know, but it’s possible that this man’s whole identity is wrapped up in his disability. It’s all he’s known for almost four decades. He’s a man who depends on and perhaps expects people to take care of him. He’s a taker. And He can’t walk, but he can talk, and perhaps he’s become a specialist at using his mouth to complain, to complain about his bum lot in life, about how he deserves better, about how no one has it as bad as he does in life. That’s all going to change, if he’s healed. *Do you want that?* Jesus asks.

His response is sort of evasive. Verse 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.’”

The fellow misses the point of the question, doesn’t he? In fact, Carson remarks, “Verse 7 reads less as an apt and subtle response to Jesus’ question than as the crotchety grumblings of an old and not very perceptive man who thinks he is answering a stupid question.”⁹

Do I want to get well? Sure, but how’s that going to happen, Mr. Stranger? Nobody helps me around here. Apparently the understood rule at this pool was *every man for himself*, and the reward went to the person who beat everyone else to the moving water.

Again, don’t miss Jesus’ compassion here. He reaches out to this man, not because he’s pleasant and deserving, but because that’s what love does. Secondly...

2. *See His sovereignty.* Jesus set His sovereign gaze on this man. In my estimation the NIV offers a poor translation in verse 6. It uses the word “learned” and

⁶ Morris, p. 301.

⁷ Observation by Findlay, in Morris, p. 303.

⁸ Barclay, p. 179.

⁹ D. A. Carson, quote taken from MacArthur, p. 174.

says that when Jesus “learned that he had been in this condition a long time.” The Greek word (*gnous*, from *ginosko*) means “knew,” not “learned,” as the ESV and KJV show.

Do you see Jesus’ sovereignty here? Who took the initiative in this contact? Jesus did. Out of all the perhaps dozens of disabled people at the pool that day, Jesus went to this one man. Jesus selected him. Jesus offered him healing. And...

C. He made a broken body healthy again (8-9). He did it in a way that revealed His authority over three realms.

1. *He revealed His authority over the man.* Verse 8—“Then Jesus said to him, ‘Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.’” Remember, Jesus is a total stranger to this invalid. Having just met Jesus he now hears Jesus tell him what to do. Those aren’t suggestions, but commands. From the very first encounter the Lord makes it very clear that He indeed is *the Lord*. He gives the commands. He expects obedience.

The result? Verse 9 says, “At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.” Notice the order. The man was healed, then he picked up his mat and walked. He wasn’t healed because he picked up his mat, but because the Master graciously chose to heal him. Yet once healed, he’s now free to obey a command he previously could not obey. For thirty-eight years he could not pick up his mat and walk. Now he can, and does.

Grace is free, my friend, but it’s not cheap. We do not earn the Savior’s favor, but having benefitted from it, the appropriate response is to give Him our all.

In this miracle the Lord revealed His authority, first, over the man. Secondly...

2. *He revealed His authority over disease.* I remind you that in the beginning, Christ spoke and creation appeared (see John 1:1-2). Now the same Christ speaks again and again creation occurs. Healthy bones and muscle and flesh instantly appear to replace non-functioning limbs. “At once the man was cured,” says the text.

There’s no mention of faith here. The invalid doesn’t even know Jesus’ name. His thoughts are preoccupied with how he’s going to get into that miracle-working pool, not with whether Jesus could heal him. But the moment Jesus spoke, his disability was gone.

So called “faith healers” in our day should take note. It’s a travesty that those who claim to possess God’s healing gift would blame their failures on the deficient faith of the sick. Please note that this miracle had nothing to do with the faith of the disabled man. It was solely the result of the intent of the Healer. Jesus simply willed the man’s body to be whole again, and it happened *instantly*.

What a beautiful illustration of how grace works in salvation! Jesus didn’t choose this man because He foresaw that the man would believe in Him. Jesus saw the man’s need and on the basis of sheer undeserved grace, He chose to restore the man.

It’s worth noting that in Acts 3 we meet another lame man, one crippled from birth. In that case the Lord used Peter to heal his body, and Acts 3:8 says, “He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.”

How about this man in John 5? How did he respond? Did he walk and jump and praise God? The text doesn’t say. Oh, he walked. But there’s no mention that he praised the one who healed him. A yellow flag? Perhaps. More about that in a moment.

At the end of verse 9 John records a peculiar detail, saying, “The day on which this took place was a Sabbath.” This is the first time we see the word “Sabbath” in John’s gospel, and we’ll see it eight more times. John is introducing us to one of the biggest hang-ups the Jewish leaders had with Jesus. They said he broke the Sabbath (5:16, 18; 7:22-23; 9:14, 16).

Answer this. Could Jesus have healed this man a day earlier, or later? Yes. Did He know His actions would infuriate the religious leaders and launch their deadly plot against Him? Yes, He knew. Why did He heal on the Sabbath then? And why did He do it again in John 9 when He gave sight to a blind man on the Sabbath?

He's revealing something, isn't He? He has authority over men, over disease, and...

3. *He revealed His authority over the Sabbath.* So ends scene one. In scene one Jesus confronted and overcame the most obvious disability that plagues the human race. He healed a disabled body. But there's another not so obvious yet even more potent disability that prevents us from experiencing life that's really life.

II. Scene two: Jesus exposed the disability of the soul (10-15).

Scene two begins with shock...

A. The Jews rebuked the healed man (10). About what? Verse 10—"And so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, 'It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.'"

You've got to be kidding. They meet a man who's been trapped in a broken body for thirty-eight years, discover that he's been healed, and they rebuke him for carrying his mat on the Sabbath. What's the big deal about the Sabbath?

Well, for starters, the Sabbath is a big deal. The fourth commandment declares in Exodus 20:10, "The seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates."

So God's Law did forbid work on the Sabbath. That included carrying certain loads according to Jeremiah 17:21-22, "This is what the LORD says: Be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem. Do not bring a load out of your houses or do any work on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your forefathers." We hear a similar warning when we read Nehemiah 13:15, where Nehemiah confronted the people for carrying loads on the Sabbath.

But what kind of loads did the Law prohibit? The Jeremiah and Nehemiah texts are talking about carrying loads for business purposes, hauling, trading, and marketing stuff to make money. Don't do that, says the Law. Set apart the Sabbath day. Don't treat it like you do the other six days where you work to make a living.

Now compare that to what's happening in John 5. Is the man who's carrying a load making any money from his so called "work"? Is he demeaning the Lord and His honor by his Sabbath-day actions? To the contrary. What could be a more God-honoring thing to do on this particular Sabbath than to carry the mat you've been lying on for decades, now as a healed man, giving God the glory for your ability to carry that mat?

The whole thing is ridiculous. It's only a *mat*, right? To you and me, maybe, but not to these first century Jews. The fact is, the man's actions didn't violate God's Law, but they most certainly violated the Jewish interpretation of God's Law. Over the centuries the Jews had come up with hundreds of man-made laws to help people obey God's law. Their intent was noble, but the result disastrous.

Did you realize that the Rabbis argued as to whether a man was sinning if he carried a needle in his robe on the Sabbath, or whether wearing artificial teeth or a wooden leg was a Sabbath violation?¹⁰ They said a man couldn't put vinegar on his teeth to alleviate a

¹⁰ Barclay, p. 182.

toothache, but he could take vinegar with his food, and the Rabbis philosophically concluded, “If he is healed he is healed.”¹¹

And this was no trivial preoccupation. At least some of the Jews actually linked the coming of the Messiah to Sabbath obedience. They believed that Messiah wouldn’t come until the Jews perfectly kept one Sabbath.¹²

Furthermore, Sabbath violation was a crime punishable by death. Which helps explain the healed man’s response to the Jews’ rebuke in verse 11, “But he replied, The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”

B. The healed man defended himself (11-13). “Hey, it wasn’t my idea! I’m a good man. I would never violate the Law. The man made me do it, the one who healed me. He told me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”

Interesting, isn’t it? Jesus told the man to do something that He knew would bring the man into conflict with the religious authorities, something they considered to be a crime punishable by death. He’s putting the man in a situation that will force him to see what he values most in his soul.

Verse 12—“So they asked him, ‘Who is this fellow who told you to pick it¹³ up and walk?’” They want to go nose to nose with this healer whose spreading his anti-Law notions.

Verse 13—“The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away [the term means ‘to dodge’] into the crowd that was there.” Jesus viewed crowds differently than we often in our ministries. We try to attract them. He avoided them.

This is the fourth major sign in John’s gospel. Ironically, as G. Campbell Morgan points out, “On a human level, what Jesus did that day, and what He said that day, cost Him His life. They never forgave Him.”¹⁴

Even in our day the critics attack Jesus, and particularly His miracles. “If Jesus really did miracles,” says the critic, “why did He end up getting killed? His untimely death proves the fallacy of His claim to deity, doesn’t it?” Not so, says John.

By including this story John is introducing us to a new theme in his gospel. *Rejection*. Not everyone applauds the miracles Jesus does. Not everyone believes in Him, even with a fickle belief as we’ve seen thus far in chapters one to four. Some see His miracles and flat out *reject* Him. They begin to reject Him in Judea in chapter five and in Galilee in chapter six. Indeed, they begin to oppose Him with a hatred that will only increase in its passion as time passes, all the way to the cross.

Now watch what Jesus did next. Verse 14 says, “Later.” How much later? The term is indefinite. Later that day? The next day? We’re not told. But at some later point, says verse 14, “Jesus found the man in the temple.” Perhaps the man went there to offer a thank offering for his healing. Again, we’re not told why. We are told this...

C. Jesus warned the healed man that he was in serious danger (14). ““See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.””

That’s strange. What did He mean by that? He begins, “*See, you are well again.*” Jesus used a perfect tense verb which stresses that the healing took place instantly in the past and the results continued to the very present. This was no placebo effect healing that

¹¹ Morris, p. 305.

¹² See quote by Gerald Borchert in MacArthur, p. 176.

¹³ Pick *it* up, they say. They don’t even call it a *mat* this time, highlighting just how ludicrous this is becoming, straining at a gnat.

¹⁴ G. Campbell Morgan, p. 87.

wore off in time. This man was made physically whole and he remained physically whole.

But there's something that wasn't right. Listen to Jesus. *Stop sinning*. This reminds me of what Jesus told the adulteress He rescued in John 8. The religious authorities wanted to stone her and asked for His input. Jesus said in John 8:7, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." And they all left, from the oldest to the youngest. And then the Lord addressed the woman and said, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and *leave your life of sin* (verses 10-11)."

Her biggest problem wasn't that she was facing physical death. It was her sin. She needed to leave her life of sin.

Stop sinning, Jesus told the man. Or what? *Stop sinning, or something worse may happen to you*. Something worse? What could be worse than suffering for thirty-eight years with a crippled body? There is something far worse, namely spending all eternity suffering the judgment of God for your sins.

Some say Jesus' words indicate that the man's disability was due to past sin, past sin that remained unconfessed. That's possible. We know that not all sickness is due to personal sin, a point Jesus made with the blind man He healed in John 9. But some sickness is. Again, not all, but some. There are consequences to sin, and sometimes the consequences are physical in nature.

In Psalm 32 David said his bones wasted away and his strength was sapped as the result of his sin (verses 3-4), and the physical affliction remained until he confessed his sin to God and experienced God's forgiveness (verse 5). We're told in 1 Corinthians 11:30 that some church members in Corinth were physically weak and sick because of unrepentant sin.

Some say that's the case here. This man spent nearly four decades as an invalid as the result of his sin. Jesus healed him as an act of grace, but warned him that if he didn't deal with his sin, something worse would happen, eternally worse.

I'm not convinced it's a specific sin that Jesus has in mind here. He tells him to *stop sinning*. It's not one sin that plagues this man. It's his sinfulness. He's a sinner and unless he stops sinning, he's in grave danger.

He's not alone. Dear friends, know this...

1. *Our biggest problem isn't physical.*
2. *Our biggest problem is our sin.* The wages of sin is death, spiritual death, disability of the soul.

That's why Jesus came to earth. He came to fix your soul problem. How? He went to the cross, took upon Himself the sin of every person who would ever believe in Him, took the penalty of that sin upon Him, the very wrath of God, and paid that penalty in full. Three days later He conquered death, and today offers life, eternal life, to all who will believe in Him.

What happened to the man? Notice verse 15, "The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well."¹⁵ Sort of ironic, isn't it?

D. The healed man left Jesus (15). He *went away*. I'm not convinced the man became a saved believer, at least not on this day. When Jesus healed another sick man, the one who was lowered through a roof in Mark 2:1-12, He announced, "Son, your sins

¹⁵ There is a difference between the question the Jews asked and the answer the man gave them. They wanted to know who told him to carry his mat. He told them who made him well, namely the person named Jesus.

are forgiven,” and then, “Get up, take your mat and walk.” But He didn’t tell this disabled man that his sins were forgiven. Apparently the man left Bethesda that day with a healed body and a still hell-bound soul.

“It seems strange,” writes Warren Wiersbe, “that the man did not actively seek a closer relationship with the One who healed him, but more than one person has gratefully accepted the gift and ignored the Giver.”¹⁶

Make it personal: What have you done with Jesus?

If this story teaches us anything, it’s this. Three realities.

1. *He cares about your physical problems.* Your aches, your pains, your physical needs. He cares. And you can call on Him for help for He has the power to make a difference with your physical problems, should He choose. But know this...

2. *He cares even more about your sin problem.* A lot of people have seen the picture of Jesus carrying a lamb on His shoulders. But few know the meaning behind it. It is found in the story “The Lamb’s Broken Leg” as told by William Branham. It’s an old shepherd story that was told in the Holy Lands.

A shepherd came carrying a sheep. Someone asked, “Why are you carrying it?” “It’s got a broken leg.” “How did it do that? Fall over a cliff?” “No, I broke its leg.” The other person said, “Why, you’re a cruel shepherd to break that sheep’s leg.” “No, I love it. It was going astray and I couldn’t make it obey me. So I broke its leg so it would have to depend on me. I carry it, feed it, and stay close to it. Through this process, it will learn to depend on me, look to me, and stay with me.”¹⁷

Know this. Jesus cares about your physical problems. But He cares far more about your sin problem, and He’ll do whatever it takes so you’ll care about it. Like telling you, “Stop sinning, or something worse may happen.” And ultimately, by going all the way to the cross. “He himself bore our sin in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed (1 Pet. 2:24).”

The truth is...

3. *He is willing to offend you so you’ll admit the truth about yourself and Him.*

¹⁶ Wiersbe, p. 305.

¹⁷ Taken from Bob Sjogren & Gerald Robison, *Cat and Dog Theology*, p. 96.