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**Sermon
by
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John 5:1-9
“Just a Conversation!”**

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, amen.

If you were trained as a counsellor you might learn to use a counselling technique called “Solution Focused Therapy”. One of the main questions that the counsellor asks with this technique is, “What are you going to do?”

Almost always the first reply would be “I need someone else to do something for me. My boss, My wife, the Army, God.” They are really saying “the solutions to my problems are the responsibility of anyone but myself”.

I think that’s a typical human response. It’s far easier to look for a rescuer than to take responsibility. That’s one of the reasons I like solution focused counselling. It reminds people of their role as a participant in their lives, not an innocent bystander as life goes by experiencing hurt, rejection, disappointment, but unable to do anything about it. It focuses attention on individual responsibility. Now this isn’t really a new counselling technique; in fact it’s one that Jesus used quite often in His conversations with people. We’re going to look at one of those conversations this morning.

As we follow the course of this brief encounter, this "conversation with Jesus" that we are looking at, between Jesus and a man with a need I’d like us to consider the possibility that Jesus may be speaking the same message to us that He did to the Lame man. The conversation begins with...

A Crazy Question (v. 6)

Go back with me for a moment to the pool of Bethesda. Here is a place where sick people congregate because they believe that they can be healed by getting into the water whenever it is stirred. Jesus approaches a man obviously crippled. He has about him the paraphernalia common to cripples who begged for a living in those days--a mat to lie on, a collection plate for the alms of those who might take pity on him; perhaps he had crutches if he was able to use them.

Jesus was speaking to him and had learned that he had been this way for 38 years. Add to this the fact that he was hanging out at a pool that was known for healing and we can begin to get some sense of how crazy it must have sounded for Jesus to ask, "Do you want to get well?"

What kind of a question is that? Does a crippled man want to get well? That’s a question that rivals one of my Dad’s all time favourites: "Do you want a thick ear, boy?" "Well Dad, can I just think about that one for a minute?" The answer to the question seems obvious.

But maybe, just maybe, the question isn’t as shallow as it seems at first glance.

Let’s just consider that for a moment. Here is a man who had been crippled for 38 years. All of that time he had relied upon the kindness of others to make his way in life. If he were to "get well" he would have to earn his way for the first time in 38 years--perhaps the first time ever. He would no longer have an excuse for what his life was. The responsibility would be his.

So perhaps the question "Do you want to get well" wasn’t such a crazy question after all. Perhaps it was a question that pierced to the very centre of the man’s heart and exposed the motives that lay deep within.

And what about us? As Jesus looks at us crippled by problems, crippled by circumstance, crippled by sin, what does He say to us? Could it be that he asks us the same question he asked of the man at the pool "Do you want to get well?"

Do we want Jesus to heal the parts of our lives where we've been damaged or is it easier to hold on to the hurt? Is it easier to let bitterness fester and to wallow in the hurt and betrayal, licking and liking our wounds?

All too often we hold on tightly to the things that paralyze us spiritually. Jesus can heal us of those things but when he does we will be left without excuse for our lives and the choices we make. We will no longer be able to cry "My life isn't my fault, others are to blame". So the question isn't crazy at all and it echoes down the ages to each of us today, "Do you want to get well?"

To the one crippled by past hurts, Jesus asks, "Do you want to be healed?"

To the one chained by secret sin Jesus asks, "Do you want to be freed?"

To the one battling adversity Jesus asks, "Do you want to overcome?"

To the one who has not yet asked Him in Jesus asks, "Do you want to be saved?"

To all of us who need His healing touch in any part of our lives He asks "Do you want to get well?"

To receive the healing He has for us we must desire to be changed. We must answer, "Yes, Lord, I am ready to put the past behind me." But the man's response to Jesus' question brings us to the second part of this conversation, it involves...

A Lame Excuse (v. 7)

No pun intended. Look with me at verse seven: "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."

This man didn't answer Jesus' question at all, but offered an excuse for why he hadn't been healed yet: "I'm all alone, there is no one to help me."

We can't help but feel sorry for the man, alone in the world, his family having died or deserted him, crippled and lonely. "Sir, I have no one to help me." It really is a tragic cry. But it still didn't answer the question, "do you want to get well," and it still amounts to an excuse. To say "there's no one to help me" also means, "I can't help myself and God's not doing anything for me either."

ILLUSTRATION: If there was ever a person who could have offered Jesus an excuse, Robert Reed was that person. You can read his story in the book 'The Applause of Heaven' by Max Lucado. Max describes him like this, "His hands are twisted and his feet are useless. He can't bathe himself. He can't feed himself. He can't brush his teeth, comb his hair, or put on his underwear. His shirts are held together by strips of Velcro. His speech drags like a worn-out audiocassette. Robert has cerebral palsy. The disease keeps him from driving a car, riding a bike, and going for a walk. But it didn't keep him from graduating from high school or attending Abilene Christian University, from which he graduated with a degree in Latin.

Having cerebral palsy didn't keep him from teaching at a St. Louis junior college or from venturing overseas on five mission trips.

And Robert's disease didn't keep him from becoming a missionary to Portugal. He moved to Lisbon, alone, in 1972. There he rented a hotel room and began studying Portuguese. He found a restaurant owner who would feed him after the rush hour and a tutor who would instruct him in the language. Then he stationed himself daily in a park, where he distributed brochures about Christ. Within six years he led seventy people to the Lord. Robert Reed didn't see fit to offer excuses to the Lord. I heard Robert speak recently. I watched other men carry him in his wheelchair onto a platform and lay a bible in his lap. I watched his stiff fingers open the pages. I watched people in the audience wipe away tears of admiration from their faces. Robert could have asked for sympathy or pity but he didn't. He did just the opposite. He held his bent hand up in the air and boasted, "I have everything I need for joy." Robert's shirts are held together by Velcro but his life is held together by joy!"

And what about us today? When Jesus asks, "do you want to get well," what is our response? When Jesus asks "do you want to be healed from your past hurts?" Do we reply, "you don't know how bad they hurt me".

When Jesus asks "do you want to be freed from the chains of your secret sin?" Do we counter, "I just can't control myself".

When Jesus says to the one oppressed by adversity, "do you want to overcome?" Is the answer, "It's just the way things are and it's not my fault".

When Jesus asks, "do you want to be saved?" Will we excuse ourselves, "I'm not nearly as bad as other people I know."

Jesus said to the man "Do you want to get well?" And he replied, "I don't have anyone to put me in."

To receive the healing Jesus has for our lives we must put away our excuses. Which brings us to the third lesson from this conversation with Jesus. Jesus ignored the excuse and gave the man...

An Impossible Instruction (v. 8)

Look with me at verse 8. "Then Jesus said to him, 'Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.'"

Jesus brings healing to us today in the same way He did back then. He didn't come to him with a maudlin sympathy that accepted his excuses and moaned, "poor you," but with a message of life and vitality. He says to us as he said to that man by the pool, "Get up and walk."

The man complained "I don't have anybody." But in Jesus **we** really do have somebody, and not just someone to drag us around on our mats of self pity but someone who can bring life to our own withered limbs, bring healing to our own damaged emotions, bring strength to our own resolve, someone who can say with all authority, "Get up and walk!" "Get over it!"

I want us to understand that this is not a self help gospel I'm proclaiming. The healing is wrought 100% by his power, it is all from Christ, all by grace - but there is a factor of human responsibility here. Think about it with me. Who healed the man at the pool? Jesus. Who had to walk? The man. Who saves us from our sins? Jesus. Who must repent and believe? We must. Who sanctifies us and gives us the power to live above sin? Jesus. Who must decide day by day to follow Him and do what is right? We must.

There has been far too much misunderstanding on this point in the church and as a result there have been far too many excuses. I'm not saying we are the masters of our own destiny or that we have the power in and of ourselves, but the Bible says (Ro 8:37) "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."

For us to act as if we are defeated is to deny the truth of God's word.

Jesus came and died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. The blood he shed washes us from sin and its bondage. The fact that he was raised from the dead demonstrates victory over Satan's oppression. Now we are able to be partakers of that victory if we reach out to him in faith. He still calls to us "Get up and walk."

It would have been easy for the man at the pool to laugh off Jesus and dismiss Him as a nutcase. It takes more strength and courage to obey His impossible instruction and leave the hurt behind, walk above the level of our problems, accept the salvation He offers.

God's work in our lives is accomplished by His grace alone but to experience it we must reach out in faith and cooperate with Him in the process of repentance--living life in a new way.

Conclusion:

Jesus' question echoes down through the ages to us today "Do you want to get well?" Today Jesus waits for our response. Will we continue to hold on to the things that hold us back? Will we offer the same old excuses? Or will we listen to the instruction of Jesus and reach for that which is beyond ourselves? Will we "Get up and walk?"

Pray with me...

Living God, we like to think that we are the world's survivors, able to meet whatever life may throw at us and emerge unscathed. But, in our heart of hearts, we know that we are as vulnerable as the next person, our composure and confidence hanging on a thread that can be broken at any time.

A crisis, difficulty, disappointment or personal tragedy, and the whole edifice we have so carefully constructed can come tumbling down around our ears. Most of the time we succeed in shutting out such thoughts, finding them too uncomfortable to contemplate. But sometimes they force their way into our consciousness and we can escape them no longer.

Loving God, save us from running away in a vain attempt to deny the truth; from taking the road that leads only to uncertainty mounting and fear gaining an ever-firmer hold.

Teach us instead to share our burdens and anxieties with you, and so to find strength, peace, hope and courage – even when the storm rages about us, secure in the knowledge of your eternal love made known through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.