

John 5:1-15
Made whole by Christ

Introduction

This miracle took place in Jerusalem during a feast of the Jews, probably either Passover (April) or the Feast of Tabernacles (October), probably 28AD. Archaeologists discovered the pool near the Sheep Gate with five porches in 1888 when the church of St. Anne in N.E. Jerusalem was being repaired. Manuscripts vary, some call it Bethzatha, House of the Alive, and others call it Bethsaida, House of Mercy. Only later manuscripts mention the angel of the Lord coming down and stirring the waters. Hasten to add that this little phrase, whether it is included or omitted, makes no difference to the wonderful miracle performed here. The authority and power and love of Jesus dominates the whole miracle.

Miracles are recorded in the Gospels for two reasons. Firstly because they actually happened, they are historical facts, which should not surprise us since Jesus is the Son of God. Secondly, they illustrate spiritual truths. This was how early preachers used them, and we should make the same use. What the Lord did physically, He still does spiritually, in opening blind eyes and enabling the lame to walk.

We can either see this miracle as an illustration of new birth – the Lord giving new life. Or it could be speaking to believers who lack abundant life. Things are far from right in their lives, and the Lord asks, “Do you want to get better or are you content as you are?” We are going to take the latter approach.

The tragedy of the scene which Jesus saw

John speaks to us of the tragic scene which met the Lord’s eyes that day in Jerusalem by the pool. There were a number of disabled people, blind, lame and paralysed, lying in helplessness and misery. Jesus singled out one who had been an invalid for 38 years. He went to Him and asked the crucial question, “Do you want to be made well? Have you the desire to be what you ought to be?”

Picture here of the spiritual condition of many who claim to have life in Christ. But something has sadly gone wrong. They have no power in their life, impotent, spiritually disabled, dependent on others, lacking vitality. Often able to look back on a time when things were very different, when they were spiritually alive and alert, and they could not be held back. That was in the past. They still make a profession, and are known as Christians, but they lack zeal and commitment. They keep up appearances out of duty, but their heart and enthusiasm is not in it.

We are all in various stages of spiritual health. Some are abounding in it, you can see it on their faces, hear it in their passing comments and feel it in the firm grip of their hand. Others are alive, but only just. They are often inwardly ashamed and in despair. What is the condition of your heart? Is the Lord at the centre? Can you say with real meaning

“Thou, O Christ, art all I want”

Are you united under his sovereign control? Or are you divided between God, self and the world? If your heart is wrong, you cannot expect anything else to be right.

Consider your thoughts. What passes through your mind, and what is lodging there? If your thoughts were written on your forehead – would you have to wear a veil? Consider your hands. Are they always doing things for God? And your knees. Is your prayer life a burden and duty, or the out-flowing of a loving heart? Your ears. What enters there? Are you ever listening for the voice of the Lord? Your appetite. Is it for the things of God? Or are the things of God not very welcome? Your mind. Are you overwhelmed with cares and worries and anxieties? They ought not to be there if you are committed to a loving heavenly Father. Your feet. How do you walk and live your life? Are you a help or a hindrance to others? Your eyes. Are your eyes blind to your real needs? Are you so full of your own importance, so satisfied and contented, that you have never seen yourself as the Lord sees you?

Is there the occasional uneasy feeling that things may not be as well as we would like to think? In fact, deep down in our more honest moments we know something is very wrong indeed. It is not good enough to compare our life with someone else's, and convince ourselves that things could be worse. We must look into God's Word and see God's standards for individual life. Maybe this has been going on for some time – perhaps not 38 years – but long enough. We need to address the problem.

The care wrought by the great physician

Into the scene of devastation and misery and shame stepped the great physician. And how compassionate and effective He proved to be. Once the man indicated his longing to be made well, Jesus gave him the command to get up, pick up his mat, and walk. With this command went divine power to obey the command. So the man picked up his mat and walked. The Lord of life made the man completely well, gave him full health. This was unique and divine work.

On the spiritual level, Christ does the same thing. He gives abundant life and health. (Some Christians have one, but not the other.) God the Father commends this great physician to our patronage. He is so well qualified by His death and resurrection. Many sickly believers have applied to Him and they have not been disappointed. He has never yet failed in any case put into His hands. He makes a searching diagnosis and does not spare the patient, but the cure is sure and instantaneous.

But after the cure it is important to remember to follow His instructions for the future. The Lord has the answer to our spiritual maladies in Him. The divine life in Him can flow into us. He can save not only from guilt, but also from the power of sin. He can cleanse our thoughts and actions. Not by Christ helping me and being with me, but by Christ replacing my own energy with His own life.

Christ, who is your life (Colossians 3:4). **Christ lives in me** (Galatians 2:20). **Christ in you** (Colossians 1:27). **To live is Christ** (Philippians 1:21) **For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose** (Philippians 2:13). **Filled to the measure of all the fullness of God** (Ephesians 3:19). Have you ever entered into these truths? Christ in me by His life can transform you, and **equip you**

with everything good for doing His will, and He may work in us what is pleasing to Him (Hebrews 13:21). **I can do all things through Him who keeps on pouring strength into me** (Philippians 4:13). He can give you an appetite for the things of God when He is undertaking for you, living in you and working through you, imparting His holiness, peace and victory. Not just an external Saviour from past guilt, but at work in you continually.

Hudson Taylor had spent many years in China before he came into realization of this. For years he had essentially depended on himself – with God’s help, of course. Then he truly became a partaker of Christ’s being and resources. He described it as an “exchanged life”. Every farthing he drew from the bank of heaven henceforth. Here is a message for every Christian. It speaks of liberty, peace and fruitfulness.

Response to a crucial question

Will you be made whole? Do you want to get well? What an unnecessary question, some may say. But this man by the pool may have given up hope, and his longing for anything better may have disappeared. He may have expected nothing now.

Some Christians do not want to get well. Content to be what God did not intend. Life could be worse. Content to laze while others labour, to watch while others work. Happy to let others look after them. To be made whole would be too demanding. For one thing, it would mean putting whole case in His hands, and giving Him the right to do whatever He will. That is a price some Christians are not prepared to pay. They do not want to be separate from sin, made like Christ, made useful to the Lord, be more committed to His will. Content to live on lower level, however uncomfortable it may be at times, than give up total control of life.

There is no doubt; to be made well will cost you yourself – that is the price. And self will do anything and pay any price rather than die. This is the root of the problem in our lives when all is said and done. Self, which is un-crucified, a death we are not prepared to die. We are not made whole and well unless we become His property and His responsibility. The very moment we put selves without reserve into His hands and ask Him for healing, He does it at once. He asks the question, not to discourage us, but to liberate, enrich and empower us. He probes, not to hurt, but to heal.

This passage is speaking to us of a living and ever-present relationship with Christ. Not just as our Saviour from past guilt, but present submission to Him now. It is not about the person next door, or the person in the pew in front. It is about me, personally.

Conclusion

The blunt fact is that we can have spiritual life without having spiritual health. We can have life, but not abundant life. Do you want to be the kind of Christian God intends you to be? Christ can make you what you ought to be –if you want to be it. His resources are as adequate today as they were in the first century. He can make us more than conquerors.

“Your God is too small” is the title of a famous book – and the title of the God we too often worship. When people have definitely handed over selves to Him, He has never failed in any case He has undertaken, when His instructions have been carried out. There is new possibility for our lives from this time onwards.