

Jesus our Healer

Rich Nathan

March 3 & 4, 2018

The Real Jesus

John 5:1-15

A number of years ago, a nurse in our congregation came to me and asked if I would pray for her. She said that she was diagnosed with bone cancer and was having to go in for a regimen of chemo and radiation if I recall correctly. So I set up an appointment to pray for her in my office between church services. The nurse came with her boyfriend. We talked for a little while and I discovered that her boyfriend did not have a personal relationship with Jesus that made a real difference in his life. Right there in my office, I had an opportunity to explain the gospel to this boyfriend. He prayed a sincere prayer of repentance and received Jesus as his Lord and Savior. I was really encouraged by this.

Then I said, "Oh gosh, we need to pray for you!" She was sitting on my sofa and I asked if I could put my hand on her shoulder to pray for her. She said, "Absolutely!" I put my hand on her shoulder and invited the Holy Spirit to come. The nurse began bouncing on the sofa like a basketball under my hand. In the Vineyard, we're taught to pray for healing with our eyes open and to observe what God is doing. So, I watched this woman just bouncing up and down. I thought, "That's different! I've never seen that before. Somebody sitting on a sofa and bouncing up and down." I prayed that she would be healed and the cancer would be destroyed in her body, and she left.

Two weeks later, she wrote to me and said that she had gotten a scan and they didn't discover any cancer. But because she previously was clearly diagnosed with cancer, they made her go through a painful needle biopsy of her hip. The short of it is, after going through this painful biopsy they discovered that she was completely cancer free! God healed her. Over the years, I've had an opportunity to watch God heal people in big ways and in small ways.

I've had the privilege of watching people's hearing be restored through healing prayer. A man in this congregation had his detached retina reattached through healing prayer. We had a healing conference in the fall. Someone wrote this:

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When the pastor from Hawaii preached last fall, he had us practice healing prayer for each other. People prayed for my left shoulder which had been "no good" for 40 years – since it was separated playing college football. It was healed – and I could freely rotate my shoulder! Then I prayed for the severe tennis elbow pain that another guy had – it was also healed! He asked me to pray for his other elbow and that was also healed. Jesus heals!

Here's one more testimony:

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God healed my heart this spring! A specialist I see did a routine EKG and discovered that due to my mitral valve prolapse, the right atrium of my heart was enlarged. She gave me the EKG graph and told me to see my GP as soon as possible. Before I saw my GP, my small group brothers and sisters laid their hands on me and prayed for God's peace and God's complete healing. My GP ran another EKG. When she returned to the room she had a shocked look on her face. She laid down three EKG graphs: the one from the specialist, the EKG in my file, and the new one she had just run. The new EKG graph was perfect and showed no abnormalities. In addition, my mitral valve prolapse was healed. I am so grateful! Our God is an awesome God!

As I said, over the years, I've had an opportunity to watch people get healed. I've heard from many people in our congregation that as a result of prayer they were healed. And I have seen many more people that I've prayed for and others prayed for who were not healed. This year, during the season of Lent, we're doing a discipleship campaign here at Vineyard Columbus called "The Real Jesus". What we want to do during this series is to try to scrape away, as much as possible, many of the religious traditions and misunderstandings regarding who this person Jesus is.

The Real Jesus grew up in a little village in Nazareth in a place called Galilee in the first century. By virtue of his resurrection from the dead the Real Jesus is alive today.

No miracle is reported more often of Jesus in the gospels than healing. He healed adults, he healed children; he healed chronic conditions and acute illnesses; he healed crowds and he healed just one individual; he healed people who were full of faith and people who were full of doubt; he healed the blind, the deaf, the crippled, epileptics, lepers, Jews and non-Jews; he healed the deserving and the undeserving, the grateful and the ungrateful. It is impossible to properly relate to the Real Jesus, the Jesus of history who is alive today, without dealing with his ministry of healing. I called today's talk "Jesus our Healer".

Slide John 5:1-15

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. ²Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. ⁵One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶When 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?"

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."

⁸Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” ⁹At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, ¹⁰and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”

¹¹But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’ ”

¹²So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”

¹³The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

¹⁴Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

Let me give you some background to this text. We read this in verses 2-3:

Slide John 5:2-3

²Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.

John tells us that Jesus was by a pool. Archeologists discovered this pool back in the 19th century. And because of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls back in the late 1940’s, we know that the name of the pool was:

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Bethesda = House of Mercy or House of Flowing

The Dead Sea Scrolls also tell us that Bethesda was a place where the sick, the dying, the blind, and the lame would gather, waiting for healing. The reason I mention this to you is to say to all of you, especially those of you who wonder about the reliability of the Bible – you ask, “Can I trust what I read in the gospels about the Real Jesus? Is this history or is it just mythology?” The reason that I mentioned the discovery of the pool by archeologists and the corroboration of this John 5 story with the Dead Sea Scrolls is to say that there is an abundance of evidence from sources outside of the Bible corroborating Bible stories. The Bible is not a book of fairy tales from “long, long ago in a faraway place...” We know where this place was – archeologists dug it up. We know what people used to do there – wait for healing.

I had the privilege several years ago to actually visit the site where the pool of Bethesda is in the old city of Jerusalem. Here’s what the pool looks like:

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Photo

When we read these stories, we're talking about facts of history not just religious beliefs. What does this story tell us about the Real Jesus?

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The Real Jesus sees the man and does something for him.

The story tells us about a man who for 38 years was an invalid. Someone had brought him to the pools to wait for the water to move. Unfortunately, whoever brought him didn't stay. In verse 7, we read that he had no one to help him into the pool when the water moved. But what we read in verse 6 tells us something about the Real Jesus.

Slide John 5:6

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?"

Mercy in the Bible is always characterized by seeing someone who is suffering. Not just glancing, but looking at a person long enough to not only notice them, but to have your heart moved so that you will actually do something on their behalf. In Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan, there was a man lying in the road. Two religious leaders glanced at him, but then turned away. They took a wide berth around him and avoided thinking about what they saw. But here's what we read in Luke 10:33-34:

Slide Luke 10:33-34

³³But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

The Samaritan saw and actually did something.

In Matthew 25, Jesus says that one way that we'll be judged will be whether we see people's suffering and did something about what we saw.

Slide Matthew 25:44-45

⁴⁴"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

⁴⁵"He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

So let me ask you a personal question. Do you look long enough at people to notice if someone is in pain? We can be so distracted by our own thoughts or by some technology that we're hooked to that we don't see and then look long enough to notice

when people are in pain. Pray for eyes to see what the Real Jesus sees in people. And if you do see, does the Holy Spirit ever move you to do something? To stop, to pray, to speak, to ask the person if you might pray for them, to give to help?

Pray not only for the eyes of the Real Jesus as you look out at the world, but pray for the heart of the Real Jesus to allow yourself to be an instrument of the Holy Spirit as you partner with Christ to heal the world.

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- The Real Jesus sees the man and does something for him.

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The Real Jesus works according to God's timing

We read in verse 5:

Slide John 5:5

⁵One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

Why did Jesus heal him on that day and not the day before, a week before or a month before? The man had been in this condition for 38 long years. Why that day? Why did Jesus choose to visit the pool on that day? Why that moment for healing and not the million moments before that?

The answer is we have no idea. Who can humanly fathom God's timing? He allowed the children of Israel to be mistreated in Egypt for 400 years before sending Moses as a deliverer to bring them to the Promised Land. He made Father Abraham and Mother Sarah wait decades before giving them their promised son. Who can fathom the timing of the Lord? On the one hand, God patiently endured centuries of rebellion from the nation of Israel, giving the nation ample opportunity to repent, before sending Israel into exile. And on the other hand, we find the Lord responding instantly to other acts of disobedience by bringing immediate judgment. At times the Lord seems slow in fulfilling his promises. At other times, the Lord responds immediately to simple pleas for healing.

Brothers and Sisters, we are so formula and technique driven we in 21st century America love control. We are control freaks. We love to discover what is the technique, the formula for making something happen. The difficulty we 21st century people have with the Real Jesus is that he cuts counter to everything in our culture regarding our need for control. With the Real Jesus, it's never – if I do A, B, and C, then he must do D. So many Christian conferences say, "If we pray for X amount of time, God will absolutely bring revival. He will absolutely will heal." We think, "If I can just get five more people to agree on Facebook to join me in this prayer then I know that God will heal my son or daughter!"

The frustrating thing about a relationship with the Real Jesus is that you can't make him do what you want. Jesus said this of the generation he was living in:

Slide Matthew 11:16-17

¹⁶“To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

¹⁷“‘We played the pipe for you,
and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge,
and you did not mourn.’

And I think Jesus could say that about our generation. We're upset because he doesn't dance to our tune. Who can understand the timing of the Lord? Let me ask you a question. How many of you heard dozens of messages in church before you finally yielded your life to Christ? I have had people come to me after sitting in church for years and say, “I heard you say today that I don't have to do anything for God to save me other than to totally rely on what his Son Jesus did for me on the cross. If I surrender my life to Christ, he will save me.” And I say, “Yes, you've got it!” Now they heard this 200 times before. Why the penny drops when it drops is a mystery of the grace of God.

A little over a decade ago, I was working out at the gym. I used to lift pretty heavy. I was doing these bent over rows and I blew out a couple of discs in my back. I was in incredible pain. I went to an orthopedic surgeon who said, “You've got two bulging discs. I can relieve the pain by an operation.” I decided to not get the operation. I heard terrible things about back operations. I was getting shots in my back. I went to a chiropractor. Nothing worked. The pain continued. I was getting prayer. Finally, I thought, “I can't live this way anymore. I guess I'll have to go in for back surgery.”

I went back to the orthopedic surgeon. He scheduled me for surgery. Two weeks before the surgery, I received prayer again and the pain just went. I cancelled my surgery and never had pain again. Why the delay? I have no idea!

The issue of the mysterious timing of the Lord does not just humble us before God so that we never try to manipulate him or approach the Lord as if he were a divine vending machine – if we put enough in through our prayers or our giving God must give us what we want – the mysterious timing of the Lord ought to also fill every one of us with hope. You can say to yourself, I may not have seen my son or daughter, my mother or father, sister or brother or spouse or friend come to know the Real Jesus yesterday, but that doesn't mean that the Lord won't move in their lives today. I may not have seen a healing yesterday for a loved one or a healing for myself yesterday or last week or last month or last year, but that doesn't mean that the healing is not coming.

Jesus tells us that the wind blows where it wills. Who knows if today isn't the day of salvation? Who knows if today isn't a day of healing?

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- The Real Jesus sees the man and does something for him.
- The Real Jesus works according to God's timing

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The Real Jesus is not limited by the size of the problem or the worthiness of the recipient

This man had been an invalid for 38 years. After 38 years of waiting, Jesus healed him.

Slide Luke 18:1

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

Don't ever stop praying for someone's salvation. And if you want to see a healing, don't ever stop praying for healing. You know that the Real Jesus can crack the hardest nut? He has available to him all power and all authority and he can crack the hardest nut and he can melt the hardest heart.

Some years ago, I got a call from a terminally ill man. He lived just up the road from where our church building was. He said that he wasn't a church-goer at all, but our church was the only church that he was aware of because he drove by it all the time. He asked if I would meet with him. He was well into his 60's and he was dying of cancer. He had lived a hard, mostly alcoholic, existence. He had alienated virtually everyone in his family. He was a widower. He was at odds with his kids. Years of his sin had taken a toll on everyone he knew.

But the Real Jesus chose that moment to tap into this man's life. The moment of his greatest need when he was dying. That hard man who had spent years wrecking his life through drinking, that mean, old, crusty guy, was cracked open as I explained the gospel to him. He began to cry. God opened up the scriptures to him. He got saved. Over the next several nights he had some prophetic dreams about his son from the Lord. Jesus spoke to him while he was sleeping. He was led not only into a healing relationship with God through Jesus, but to reconciliation with some family members before he died. At his funeral, I was able to say, "You know, John did not live a good life. It would be a lie to stand up here and talk about how wonderful he was. Let's not kid each other. You knew him. He didn't live a good life. But I can tell you the God's honest truth that John died well."

Wouldn't you want that for a parent, for a grandparent, for someone you know? No person, no sickness, no chronic condition, no political problem, no problem in our nation's capital, no problem internationally, no addiction, no situation is too hard for the Real Jesus. The Real Jesus is not only not limited by the size of the problem, he's not limited by the worthiness of the recipient.

When the authorities come around and ask this man who had been healed – who told him on the Sabbath to get up and pick up his mat and walk, the man throws Jesus under the bus. Here's what we read:

Slide John 5:15

¹⁵The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

The Bible doesn't say that this was a good guy. Many of the people that Jesus healed, there's no discussion, no real interest in whether they were good people or bad people. Like so many of us, this man was full of faults and yet he still received the healing mercy of Jesus. The Real Jesus doesn't divide the world into good people and bad people so that he only heals the good people. He sees that we're all fallen, we're all sinners, and we all need the healing touch of Jesus.

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- The Real Jesus sees the man and does something for him.
- The Real Jesus works according to God's timing
- The Real Jesus is not limited by the size of the problem or the worthiness of the recipient

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The Real Jesus heals the whole person

I want us to look at Jesus' statements in this story. Because he says three things and each of them tackles an aspect of healing that goes beyond the physical healing of our bodies. The physical healing of our bodies is hugely important, but Jesus wants more than that. He wants to heal our whole person.

What's the first statement of Jesus that we read in this story?

Slide John 5:6

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?"

What I read in this is that:

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The Real Jesus heals us emotionally

Do you want to get well? What a rude question. What do you mean, do I want to get well? I'm lying here by a healing pool. Do I want to get well? I'm going to a therapist for my depression. Do I want to get well? I attend Celebrate Recovery every Friday night to deal with my addiction. Do I want to get well? I'm going to the Begin Again ministry that Vineyard Marriage and Family Ministry runs to heal my marriage. What do you mean, do I want to get well?

Therapists tell us that there are what they call

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Secondary benefits to remaining ill

People receive benefit for not overcoming a problem. Just because somebody goes to a therapist doesn't mean they necessarily want to get well. Wise therapists know that their clients may not get well because they are attached to a relationship with that therapist. The longer they stay unwell, the more the therapist will continue to see them. Therapists say that some people put off losing weight because they are anxious about dating or about being sexually attractive. Some people sabotage themselves because they are more afraid of succeeding than they are of failing. They fear that if they succeeded, they would be given increased responsibility, a more prominent role in an organization, so they sabotage themselves. Someone may go to marital counseling not because they're willing to change but to justify themselves with a pastor.

Just because we're going through the motions of lying by a healing pool doesn't necessarily mean that we want to get well. Maybe it does, but not necessarily. The Real Jesus gets at this guy's divided heart, his mixed motives, his ambivalence about getting well. The Real Jesus wants to get at our divided hearts, at our mixed motives regarding why it is that we're undergoing marital counseling or why it is that we're going to this addiction group. The Real Jesus looks each of us in the eye and says, "How much do you really want to change? How far are you really willing to go to get this problem out of your life? Do you want to get well?" It's not as easy to answer as it first appears.

Here's the second thing that the Real Jesus says:

Slide John 5:8

Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."

The Real Jesus not only heals us emotionally,

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The Real Jesus heals us volitionally

In other words, Jesus re-engages this man's will. It is very common for people with chronic conditions to experience deep feelings of powerlessness. My choices don't matter. I've lost control over my body. I've lost control of my future. I've lost control of my dreams. It takes so much time for me to do anything. The Real Jesus is concerned about healing the whole person. So he has this chronically ill guy, this long-term invalid, participate in his own healing. Jesus makes him do some things for himself. "Pick up your mat. Walk! I'm not going to do everything for you. I'm not going to lift you off the ground. I'm going to give you back the dignity of your full humanity. You can do something for yourself."

Wise nurses and wise caregivers know that they should not do for a patient what the patient can choose to do for themselves because we increase feelings of powerlessness. Jesus gives this guy back a sense of his own dignity. "You get up now. Pick up your mat. You walk."

Jesus heals us emotionally. Jesus heals us volitionally – he re-engages our wills.

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The Real Jesus heals us spiritually

The third statement that Jesus makes in this story is found in verse 14:

Slide John 5:14

Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

A few chapters later in John 9 is the story of the man born blind. Jesus says that the sickness, in his case, was not caused by sin. Jesus teaches us that we can't draw a simple connection between sickness and sin. And yet, sometimes sin is at the root of sickness. We can't avoid this very difficult statement from Jesus.

Slide John 5:14b

Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.

The unavoidable meaning is that the bad thing that happened to this guy was caused by his sin and if he didn't stop doing that, it would come back. He had an open door to the demonic that needed to be slammed shut. Jesus is interested not only in healing our bodies, he's interested in healing our whole persons – emotionally, volitionally, spiritually. Part of the healing may involve us making a full and complete confession and radically repenting – turning away from our sin. Jesus wants you to be completely well.

Here's the last thought as we finish up this teaching today about Jesus our Healer. I want to conclude with this:

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The Real Jesus will use anyone to heal.

Jesus gave away his ministry of healing. He didn't horde it just for himself. He wasn't like one of those TV healers who say, "You have to come up on the stage because I'm the only one who can pray for you." Jesus gave his healing ministry away. He first gave it away to his 12 disciples. And he sent them out to heal the sick. Then he gave it away to 70 other followers. And you can read their story in Luke 10. Finally, Jesus gives his healing ministry to us today. He told his followers in Matthew 28:

Slide Matthew 28:19-20

¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

One of the things that Jesus commanded them to do was to go out and heal the sick. The disciples taught people to obey everything they were commanded. That includes going out and healing the sick. The Real Jesus will use anyone to heal. I want to close by showing you this video:

Video

Jesus our Healer

Rich Nathan

March 3 & 4, 2018

The Real Jesus

John 5:1-15

- I. The Real Jesus sees the man and does something for him.

- II. The Real Jesus works according to God's timing.

- III. The Real Jesus is not limited by the size of the problem or the worthiness of the recipient.

- IV. The Real Jesus heals the whole person
 - A. The Real Jesus heals us emotionally

 - B. The Real Jesus heals us volitionally

 - C. The Real Jesus heals us spiritually

- V. The Real Jesus will use anyone to heal.