

Jesus Makes Us Whole

**John 5:1-15**

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Who are the paralyzed? I would like to share with you this morning the minutes from an official church board meeting dated June 19, 1908. A certain Mr. Gruber introduced the following motion to be discussed:

Nine reasons not to introduce the typewriter into our church:

1. The paper must be put into the machine and aligned properly, tabs must be set. This is not easy. When writing by hand, one simply begins, exactly where you want with no restrictions.
2. With a typewriter, you have to constantly remember to capitalize and put in punctuation. It is easy to forget, and to go back and change things is hard. When writing by hand, such things are automatic.
3. With the typewriter you have to be trained to find the proper keys. This takes time. We already know how to write.
4. With the typewriter you are limited to the size and spacing of the type. When writing by hand you can use any size letters or style you want.
5. With the typewriter, centering and setting margins is not easy; when writing it is no problem.
6. A typewriter breaks down and costs to be fixed. Writing does not.
7. Correcting a mistake after something has been typed is a problem; when writing my hand it is not.
8. The church has gotten along for over 1900 years without a typewriter, why do we need this now?
9. Instead of learning a machine with all the above drawbacks, time should be spent on penmanship.

I submit to you the paralyzed are all those who cannot change. If you are going to sustain a marriage, sustain employment, or just get through life, you are going to have to bring yourself to make planned and strategic changes in the way you think, speak and behave.

We have before us in John 5:1-15 the story of a man who would not change. He had been there for 38 years doing the same thing every day and expecting different results. How many students are there in this world that keep using the same lousy study habits and getting the same lousy test results? How many parents are there in this world that keep using the same lousy techniques of neglect, denial and or angry outburst, and keep getting the same lousy results from their kids? You would think that after 38 years of trying the same thing and failing, this guy would make some different choices!

Jesus sees right through this guy. Jesus sees that the real paralysis in this man is not in his legs, it is in his heart! He asks him, "Do you want to get well?" (John 5:6) Maybe this guy is making good money getting donations and charity as a paralyzed beggar. Maybe he doesn't really want the responsibility that comes with freedom and mobility. Many people in this world don't really want freedom, what they want is for someone else to take care of them—a boyfriend,

a girlfriend, the government, the church, even the county jail. It is an easy thing for Jesus to heal paralyzed legs. It is a far more difficult matter to change the human heart. Yet this is where the greatest miracles in life occur: when hearts and minds change: responsibility is taken and resolution is formed.

“Do you want to get well?” It’s a simple yes-or-no question, but the man gives an evasive answer: “Sir, I have no one to help me...” (John 5:7) How could anyone believe this guy? You mean to tell me that for 38 years there has been no one? This is classic human nature, to avoid responsibility for your life by blaming someone else:

“It’s the school’s fault that I’m not getting an education.”

“It’s my spouse’s fault that our marriage is struggling.”

“It’s the government’s fault that I don’t have a job.”

“It’s the church’s fault that I’m not growing in my faith.”

“It’s the communities’ fault that I don’t have any friends.”

“It’s the bosses’ fault that my workplace is such a rotten place to work.”

“It’s everybody else that needs to change so that I can be happy.”

When we think this way, we are surrendering our life to the devil. We are clamping ourselves in chains. We are consigning ourselves to being victims. Here’s a simple formula: Perception determines behavior, and behavior determines reality. If I think I am a victim, I will act like a victim, and if I act like a victim, I will become a victim. In other words, I can think myself sick. I can think myself into paralysis, loneliness and despair. The Bible says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind... (Romans 12:2). Jesus wants to transform this man’s thinking, and he wants to transform yours too. The prelude to a miracle is when we change the way we think about ourselves, about others and about life.

Jesus senses that this man does not really have the desire to be made well, and so, to illustrate the point, he issues a command, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” (John 5:8) This is not a request, a suggestion or an invitation; it is a direct order, like an officer would give to an enlisted man. Jesus cuts through the evasions, the excuses and the blaming, and he orders this man to take responsibility for his life. “Get up! Walk!”

When author Phil Johnson first became a pastor, he was assigned to ten churches strung out in the hinterlands of Newfoundland, Canada. The smallest church was 40 miles away by

snowmobile. He rode out there to conduct services one Sunday only to find one fisherman who had also traveled about 20 miles to get there. Pastor Johnson was discouraged and frustrated. He thought seriously about just saying a prayer and sending the guy home. But then he realized that the both of them had traveled a combined 60 miles in the snow to get there and would have to travel back the same distance, so he decided to conduct the entire service: hymns, sermon, Holy Communion and all. The fisherman never looked up and seemed to be completely disinterested. Pastor Johnson's heart fell into despair—thinking it all a waste as he went through the motions of worship. After the service, his attitude changed when the fisherman finally spoke and said, “Reverend, I've been thinking about becoming a Christian for 30 some odd years, and today is the day.”

When we take responsibility for our lives, it is often the opening Jesus needs to work his miracles. One person taking responsibility can change a church or a school or a family. If you will just let Jesus transform your heart, then you'll see miracles you could not imagine!