

Alpha 10: How Does God Heal Today?

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This morning we continue with our series of messages addressing the questions asked in our Alpha Class. These are core questions persons ask about the Christian faith. Today we wrestle with the question: "How does God heal today?"

John 5:1-9

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. 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. ⁴ 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.

For years when I read this story I pictured the Pool of Bethesda as a small pool of water about twenty feet across and a couple of feet deep. It would look like something you would see in a backyard with lily pads and gold fish swimming around. I could visualize maybe ten or twelve persons lying beside it. Then for the 25th anniversary of our church, you gave Margaret and me a trip to the Holy Land. That trip totally transformed the way I read the Bible. One of my misconceptions the trip completely changed was that picture of the Pool of Bethesda. This pool was built by King Herod as a water source for the one million pilgrims who would make their way to Jerusalem to celebrate Jewish holy days—like the Passover. A little pool twenty feet wide and two feet deep would not provide much water for a million people for a week.

Let me show you a couple of photographs we took of this pool. This first one shows something of the depth of one of the sections of the pool. You can tell how deep it is by looking at the persons in the upper right hand corner of the picture. The water would fill up the pools in between festivals. As the crowds fetched water from the pool, the level

would subside. To get water, persons had to go down the steps to reach it. The ladder at the top of the picture is a 12-foot ladder. The first step was a big one! Actually some of the steps have eroded away over time. Scholars claim that the pool was 360 feet long, 126 feet wide and 80 feet deep. Here is an artists rendering of what the two sections of the pool would look like in New Testament times.

When the scriptures say that a great number of disabled people gathered at the pool, we can now visualize hundreds of them. Why would they come? They believed that a healing angel would enter the water unexpectedly. A stirring of the water was the sign of the angel's presence. The first person to enter the water when it stirred would be healed. Now you can understand why the paralyzed man had difficulty getting into the water—it was quite a trip.

Jesus approaches this man who has been an invalid for 38 years. He asks him what might seem to us like a strange question: "Do you want to get well?" What are you thinking, Jesus? Of course he did! He came to that pool every day including the Sabbath hoping to get healed when the water stirred. Why would Jesus ask, "Do you want to get well?"

Jesus could look into the soul of a person and know their deepest need. To another paralyzed man, he said, "Your sins are forgiven." Jesus knew that man was paralyzed by guilt and needed forgiveness. The paralyzed man beside the pool needed to face his attitude about his condition. He had been paralyzed so long, it had become his identity. People took care of him. He sat around a pool all day. He did not have to work. Perhaps he never got into the water because he did not want to get well.

"Do you want to get well?" It is a question that perhaps some of us need to wrestle with today. I have talked with persons who have suffered traumatic experiences in their childhood. They struggle with resentment, bitterness and depression. It is

understandable. Terrible things happened to them. But sometimes I wonder if they hang on to the resentment and bitterness for years because it is a way to get sympathy or excuse themselves from many life experiences. In a twisted way they have come to a place where they enjoy the attention they are getting. Jesus would ask them: “Do you want to get well?”

Persons with addictions to drugs, alcohol, food or pornography use those things to numb the pain in their lives. Even though the addiction may be destroying their lives and their relationships, they hang on to them. They don't want to quit. The addiction provides a temporary relief from the pain, and they don't think they can survive without it. Often a teenager who is an addict gets most of their parents' attention. The good kid in the family often suffers neglect. The addicted child is afraid that if he gets well, he won't get any attention either. Jesus would ask, “Do you want to get well?”

Is there a problem, an issue, an illness in your life that you keep hanging on to even though it is destroying you? Do you want to get well?

The paralyzed man did not answer Jesus' question directly. He did not say “Yes” or “No.” Instead he blamed others, “I have no one to help me into the pool.” “Poor little me, no one will help me.” I wonder if that was reality? Obviously someone brought him to the pool every day. He did not complain about hunger, so someone was feeding him. In all his 38 years had no one offered to help him? Or had he just missed all the ones who would have helped him to get well because they did not do it the way he preferred? “I have no one to help me into the pool.” Perhaps someone had offered to take him to a doctor. “No thanks, I need someone to help me into the pool.” Perhaps someone had offered to pray for healing. “No thanks. I need someone to help me into the pool.” Because the help did not come the way he wanted it, he came to the conclusion he had no one to help him.

Some persons get fixated on a specific way they think God should heal them. If that does not happen, they blame others and they blame God. Some people expect God to perform a miracle and heal them instantly and painlessly. They close themselves off to other options.

A few weeks ago in my message on prayer, I briefly mentioned that the Bible reveals at least five ways in which God answers our prayer for healing. I want to expand on those this morning.

1. **Instant, miraculous healing.** Jesus could speak a word or reach out and touch someone. Instantly they were healed. The woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years touched the hem of Jesus' garment and instantly the bleeding stopped. (Mark 5:25-34) God still performs miracles today. By definition miracles are the exception, but they still happen.
2. **Extended time.** Hezekiah was told he had only a short time to live. He prayed and God answered his prayer by giving him fifteen additional years. (II Kings 20:1-6) In many cases medical science can make a reasonable estimation of the remaining lifespan of a terminally ill patient. Sometimes a person lives a quality life for much longer than the prognosis. God may answer their prayer for healing by giving them additional time.
3. **Divine Leading to a Remedy.** Jesus healed a blind man by making a paste of saliva and sand. (John 9:1-7) In New Testament times, saliva was believed to have medicinal value especially for eye infections. Jesus could have healed the man by merely speaking words. Instead he chose to heal by using the accepted medical practices of his day. It was God's way of validating medical science as a part of his healing process.

4. **Sufficient grace.** Three times Paul prayed for healing. God did not heal him instantly. Instead God answered Paul's prayers by saying: "My grace is sufficient for you." God healed Paul's attitude toward his illness and enabled him to experience grace through his illness. (II Corinthians 12:7-9) Terminally ill persons who experience this form of healing emanate grace to everyone around them.
5. **Triumphant crossing.** Every other form of healing is only temporary. Death itself is the ultimate healing. When we are resurrected with Christ, we will have a body that is whole and complete. Our resurrected bodies will not be subject to disease or death. (I Corinthians 15:42-49)

If we get focused on only one way that we expect God to heal us, we may miss his healing power in our lives. We pray for healing and we let God as the Great Physician determine what healing he knows is best for us. Jesus told the man at the pool to get up and walk. He did not need to get into the pool to be healed. Thankfully, the man opened himself to a new way of healing and got up and walked away.

As we look at the healing incidents in the Bible, we also notice a variety of ways in which healing is requested. Sometimes persons seek out Jesus directly and ask him to heal them. One day a man with leprosy approached Jesus and said: "Lord, if you are willing you can make me clean." Jesus replied he was willing and healed him instantly of his leprosy. (Matthew 8: 2, 3) We can ask Jesus for healing directly.

Another time four men brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus carrying him on a mat. When they could not get through the crowd gathered to hear Jesus teach in a house, they carried their friend to the roof and removed the ceiling tiles. They lowered him at Jesus' feet. "When Jesus saw **their faith**, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' And then he told him to take his mat and go home." (Mark 2:1-12) Notice that Jesus responded to the faith of the friends. The man did not ask Jesus for healing. His

friends brought him to Jesus. You may know someone today that you need to bring to Jesus for healing. They may not feel worthy to come to Jesus. They may be too exhausted to come to Jesus. You need to bring them.

Another time a Roman centurion came to Jesus and asked him to heal his servant who was suffering terribly. Jesus offered to go to his house and heal the servant. But the centurion told Jesus that he believed he had authority to heal from anywhere. "Just speak the word, and I believe my servant will be healed." Jesus spoke the word and the servant was healed at that very moment from a distance. This morning you can pray for the healing of someone you care about even though they are not here. Jesus has authority to heal anywhere, anytime.

We are going to conclude our service this morning with an opportunity for you to receive healing prayer for yourself or someone you care about. During our hymn of invitation members of our healing prayer team are going to come and stand behind the altar rail. These folks are part of our healing prayer room on Thursday evening. They have the gift of praying for healing. I had the opportunity to have them pray for me when I was experiencing a lot of stress. Peace filled my soul as they prayed.

They will pray for physical healing, or emotional healing or spiritual healing. They will ask God to heal you or someone you care about and then trust God to heal in the way he knows is best. They will ask you if you would like to be anointed with oil. The Bible says that if we are sick, we are to ask the leaders of the church to pray for us and anoint us with oil. As water is a symbol of cleansing in baptism, oil is a symbol of healing in prayer. If you want to be anointed they will anoint you. If not they will pray for you. It is up to you.

Let's pray and invite the Great Physician to come in a powerful way among us this morning. Do you want to get well?