

THE HELPLESS AND HOPELESS HEALED.

This sermon was preached in Shalom Church, Singapore in 2004.

Scripture Reading: **John 5:1-18**

To care for the elderly --- this is tough! To care for the sick - this is tough! To care for the elderly who is sick --- this combination is VERY tough!! Many will keep their distance. Many will turn away from helping, because it is too demanding. Some may help. Kudos to them. But for how long? 1 week? 1 month? 1 year? 10 years? 30 years?

11 February 2004. The Straits Times screamed at us with this headline: ***Elderly abuse: 100 cases a year just tip of the iceberg.*** The abuse could be physical --- knocks and punches. The abuse could be emotional --- disparaging remarks. Or it could be just plain neglect! The report goes on to say that "*Many are mistreated or neglected by their own children.*" In fact, it says, "*for half of them, their children are the culprits.*" 80-year-old Madam Chee Ah Lin was cited as an example. After her adopted 45-year-old son refused to give her money, she took him to court. Although he is required to give her \$200 a month for maintenance, he sometimes fails to do so. Madam Chee, who believes he resents having to support an adopted mother, said: "*Out of love, I gave him the money I saved for my funeral but he has brought me nothing but frustration. In his eyes, I am dead.*"

Turn now, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, to **John 5**. If this man in **John 5** is alive today, he will definitely identify with Madam Chee! He will say, concerning his family and friends, "*In their eyes, I am dead.*" Look at him. *Where is he?* By a pool called Bethesda.

'Bethesda' means 'house of mercy'. It has been said that the waters there have some medicinal value. Some have become well, so it was reported, after they dipped themselves in it when they saw ripples forming. But if you think that the pool @ Bethesda is like the modern day wellness spa, you can't be more wrong! Why? Because no one can step into this place without holding his breath! Or covering her nose with a tissue! This place

stinks! Yes, there is aromatherapy, but it is aromatherapy of a different kind! This place is full of sick people! All kinds of sick people.

Verse 3 speaks of '*a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralysed*'. It is quite believe-able to say that most of them will be the elderly. Can you smell the sweat? It must be hot during the day, else why would some kind soul built five porches there for these people. Can you see and smell the unfinished food? Some of them could not walk, like this man. How then do they go to the toilet? What do you think? Certainly no diapers then! Do you think there will be a cleaner who will come every morning to clean this place? Or a helpful nurse to come and help bath these sick people? What a place! Certainly not a place you will bring tourists! Certainly not a place Singaporean will bring their children! And here's the big challenge for many of us! Jesus walked into such a place!

Not out of necessity. But because He chose to! Willingly, cheerfully. Christians, will you follow your Lord there? Will you pay attention and speak to someone there, like your Lord did? What will be a modern equivalent of this place? A nursing home? A hospice? Christians, will you step into a nursing home? Nice hotel, yes; nursing home? Now, nail this distressing and depressing picture firmly on your mind's wall. Because this is where this man is.

How is he? Helpless, friendless, hopeless. You wouldn't want to switch place with him.

He is helpless. **Verse 5** and **verse 7** combine to tell us that he is paralysed. It has been rumoured that the water of Bethesda can make you well, if you are the first to jump in when you see ripples! Now, who will believe a thing like this? Initially, you will not. But after you have consulted every known doctor and tried every known remedy, and nothing seems to work, your view could be very different. Why not give this a try? So we find this man here. We can safely assume that he is here because he could find no relief, no healing anywhere else. He is helpless.

He is friendless. How did he come here? Someone brought him? Family members? Friends? Perhaps they did, and maybe they were there to help

him, to encourage him and to clean him initially. But now, they are nowhere to be seen! Hear his complaint --- **verse 7**. There must be some element of truth in it. "*Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred; but while I am coming, another steps down before me.*" Where are his family members? Where is the support? From family, from friends? Sadly, he has been forgotten. Tragically, he has been abandoned. It is not surprising if you sense bitterness in his tone and see frustration in his eyes. He is friendless.

He is hopeless. In his answer, he seems to suggest that others had been made well. Initially, those cases would have raised his hope. But one year passed into another, and now hope becomes hopelessness. Delight has turned into despair. He has been like that for 38 years! Is there hope for me, even me?!? If someone has discovered a new drug to cure paralysis, would I be chosen? Most unlikely! 38 years!! It feels more like an eternity!! You can't blame him (can you?) for feeling hopeless. There is Jesus standing before him, and we note that he did not even open his mouth to ask for help. Why bother! Can anything good come out of it? He has given hope long ago. There he is, @ Bethesda, waiting to be cured. But am I exaggerating if I say that he is actually there waiting to die. He is hopeless.

The man before us is has been neglected, overlooked, forgotten. He is helpless, friendless, hopeless. Now, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, here's the Good News! There is help for the helpless. There is hope for the hopeless. A man paralysed for 38 years can stand up, take up his bed and walk! This is not fantasy. It is fact.

Before Jesus came to Bethesda, it was all gloomy for this man. After Jesus arrived, it is all gladness! Jesus Christ makes all the difference. If Jesus had not come, if Jesus had not taken the initiative and spoke to him, he would have lived and died in the same way he had spent those 38 years --- in pain, in misery, in his sin. But Jesus came, Jesus spoke, and Jesus healed. Jesus Christ makes all the difference. In his life. And it could be your life today.

Join me now, my friends, as we take a closer look at this encounter. We are going to focus on the dialogue --- the dialogue between Jesus and this man.

Let us begin with **THE QUESTION OF JESUS.**

That's in **verse 6**. This man has been sick for 38 years. He is lying near the pool of Bethesda, hoping to be healed. Here comes Jesus, and His first question is: "*Do you want to be made well?*" At first look, this seems to be an unnecessary and ridiculous question. It is like driving along an expressway and seeing a car on the road shoulder, and the driver burying his head inside the bonnet. You pull over, walk up to him and asked, "*Anything wrong with your car?*" If that man has a nice character, he will say to you, "*Oh, nothing wrong. I am just having an enjoyable time hugging my carburettor!*" Is this the case with Jesus, or rather with His question here? No!

Jesus asked no unnecessary or ridiculous question. Instead, He puts the finger at the real issue. *Do you want to be made well?* It has been a long 38 years. He may have lost his will to be made well and given up any hope of being healed. This question therefore brings the whole issue back into focus. You are sick. You cannot make yourself well. In fact, no one so far can make you well. And you are miserable. In truth, your miseries just increase in proportion to the passing days. You need help. But do you **REALLY** want to be helped?

38 years is a long time. Over this period, certain habits were formed; a certain lifestyle has developed. All that is going to change the moment you are healed. As someone has commented, "*Cure has its implications.*" You have not worked for any piece of bread that you have consumed for the past 38 years. You could not walk, so you could not work. You begged, and others pitied you. Do you see those out there walking? Well, they are working. Unlike yours, their legs are strong, and they will have to work, if they want to eat. And you will have to live like them once you are healed. So I ask you: Do you **REALLY** want to be healed?

Healing may look attractive from a distance, but up close --- that could be a very different story. For being healed brings with it implications. Your "no-need to work", your "no responsibility, no accountability" lifestyle will have to go. Jesus is focusing this man's attention on the real issue. "*It is not My willingness that is the issue here,*" Jesus says. He is willing. Else why would Jesus come here, why would Jesus stand before him, why would Jesus speak to him? "*It is not My willingness but yours that's the issue!*"

My dear friends, the same question, the same issue remains for you today. Some of us have problems, and we know we have problems. But do we really want the problems dealt with by Christ? We may know of people who had been sick previously, and now refused to get well. For some reason, they want to remain sick. They may complain about their sickness, about their pain and misery, but the truth is, they do not REALLY want to get well! The same could be true for some of us concerning our problems!

Sin has really perverted us. Sometimes, we rather 'enjoy' our problems --- we enjoy moaning about it, enjoy telling others about it, and dare I say it ~~ we enjoy getting pitied because of it. But we do not really want to deal with it! Haven't you met people and behaviours like that? And this is true ultimately with our ultimate problem --- SIN. Nice talk about salvation, about forgiveness, about eternal life. Nice from a distance, but up close? Salvation, forgiveness, eternal life has implications. Sins have to be given up, sinful practices have to go, your life has to be changed. Are you ready, prepared to give these up?

Here is Jesus Christ, the true God, the only Saviour. He alone can save you from your sins. He alone can forgive you and give you eternal life. The issue is, the question is: *Do you really want it?*

Let us move on to **THE REPLY OF THE SICK MAN.**

Verse 7. What do you think of his reply? The young people present will probably say, "So long-winded!" The CEOs and the MDs present will likely say, "Get to the main point!" To a simple, straightforward question "*Do you want to be made well?*" he gives a very long answer that did not really answer the question. He seems to be explaining why he did not, could not get well after 38 years. In fact, he seems to be taking this as an opportunity to let out some steam! *I am paralysed, I can't move fast. I have no one to help, everyone has left me. The people here don't value seniority, though I am here for 38 years, they don't give way to me.*

His answer reveals his state of mind. It's 'Me, my problems, my illness, my depression.' It also reveals something else. He does not know who it was who is now standing before him and talking to him. No idea, whatsoever. Therefore no idea what this Man could do. What Jesus said to the Samaritan woman in **John 4** could very well be repeated to him here. "*If you knew who it is who speaks to you, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you healing.*" No knowledge of Jesus, no faith in Jesus --- that's what this sick man's reply reveals. What's the response of Jesus?

This brings us to **THE RESPONSE OF JESUS.**

Verse 8. This response of Jesus reveals two things about Jesus.

[1] *It Shows Us His Great Power.*

Once again, we are confronted with the power of Jesus. In **John 2**, we saw Jesus performed a miracle on the spot. He turned water into wine by an act of His will. No mere man could do this. In **John 4**, we saw Jesus performed a miracle from a distance. He healed a dying boy by a simple pronouncement. Again, no mere man could do this.

Here, we see Jesus performing another miracle. A man who has been paralysed, not 38 minutes ago, not 38 hours ago, but 38 years ago, has been healed! 38 long years --- a very stubborn medical condition --- that could pose quite a problem for medical people, even today. But that is no obstacle to Jesus, not one bit! "*Rise, take up your bed, and walk!*" He is commanded to walk. Not walk so that you can be healed, but walk because you are healed!

Once again we come face to face with the amazing power of Jesus. By a simple word, a simple act of His will, a stupendous miracle takes place.

Look at **verse 9**. He is healed *immediately* and he *walks*. Not gradually, not partially, but immediately and completely! Who could this be? No need to guess. Read His own claims in **verse 17**, and how the audience then understood His claims. He made Himself equal with God. In simple words, He claims to be God --- the Almighty God!! This is one truth that this miracle is meant to point us to. Jesus is a Man, but He is not just a mere Man. He is God!

[2] *It Shows Us His Sovereign Grace.*

Here is a sick man who is totally confused and ignorant. He does not know who Jesus is. He has no faith in Jesus. Note that he did not ask Jesus to heal him, unlike the nobleman we met in **John 4**. YET Jesus moved beyond his confusion, beyond his ignorance, and simply healed him! You can be very sure that it was not his knowledge, nor his faith that moved Jesus to heal him. He has no knowledge and no faith! You can also be very sure that it was not his goodness, his noble character that attracted the attention of Jesus and merited his healing. This man does not have much goodness and noble character to talk about!

Look at **verse 9**. He was healed. What's next? He went off! Did he thank Jesus at all? The fact that he did not even know who it was who healed him --- what is His name --- how likely is it that he has thanked Jesus? When he was confronted by the religious leaders about his carrying the mattress, what did he say? "*He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'*" It's not my fault! He told me to do it!

When he finally found out the identity of the person who healed him, what did he do? He reported Jesus to the authorities! "*Ha, now I know who that person is. He is Jesus. Well, he's the one you want. Not me.*" What a cad! Why did Jesus heal him? Did he deserve it? Why did Jesus save me? Do I deserve it? And why did Jesus not drop me off along the way? I have proven to be a cad more than once! Jesus did not wait till he is clearer in his thoughts, better in his character, before healing him. This is sovereign grace. And this is how He treats sinners, sinners like you and me! If He has waited till we are clearer, till we are better, then we will never be saved!

We must come finally to **THE CONCERN OF JESUS**.

Verse 14. Jesus had healed him of his paralysis. But this is not where Jesus wants to stop. Temporal blessings have been bestowed. But man is more than just body. Man has a soul. And the soul is more important than the body! *See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.* This temporal blessing is meant to lead you to seek for spiritual blessing. You body has been healed. What about your soul? You can now walk. But are you walking in God's way? Sin no more. Be reconciled to God. Confess your sins to Him. Else, a worse thing will come upon you.

Being paralysed for 38 years is a very terrible thing. Something far, far more terrible awaits all who remains unreconciled to God. Not 38 years, but an eternity of torments and misery in hell,

forever separated from God, the Source of life and joy. Sin no more. Turn from your sins and be reconciled to God! Surely, my dear friends, this is where this miracle must lead you and me to. It is true that God has been very kind to you, even on occasions you do not know and do not deserve. But all those kindness and goodness are meant to lead you to turn from your sins, stop your rebellion, and make your peace with God. Peace with God can only come through the Lord Jesus Christ. This powerful and gracious Saviour that we have seen here, He came as Man and died on the Cross for sinners. Only through His blood, believing in His death and resurrection, can you be forgiven, be adopted into God's family and be at peace with God.

Today, He commands you what He commanded that man that day. See, you have been blessed. Sin no more. Be reconciled to God. Lest a worse thing come upon you.

Let me end by telling you of another paralytic. This time, a lady --- her name is Joni Eareckson Tada. She once said: *Being "glorified" --- I know the meaning of that now. It's the time after my death, when I'll be on my feet dancing.* Unlike this man in **John 5**, she was not healed physically. But while the bodily paralysis remains, the paralysis of her soul is gone. She did not have the physical blessing, but she has the spiritual blessing. She has Jesus in her heart, she has her sins forgiven, and she has the blessed hope of a glorious eternity in heaven. Friends, thank Jesus for your earthly blessings, but go on and plead with Him for the spiritual blessing of eternal life. That's the real thing!