

Live Guarding on the Sabbath

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Date: 25 July 2021

Preacher: Dr. Don Owsley

[0 : 00] Good morning, all. This morning we're looking at John chapter 5, where Jesus does some lifeguarding on the Sabbath day.

He's always doing things like that. John chapter 5, I'll read verses 1 through 9.

That's what we'll be looking at. After this, there was the feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem, by the sheep gate, a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porches.

In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind and lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water.

Then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. A certain man was there, who had an infirmity for 38 years.

[1 : 18] When Jesus saw him lying there, he knew that he had already been in that condition a long time. He said to him, Do you want to be made well?

The sick man answered, Sir, I have no one, I have no man, to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up.

But while I am coming, another steps down before me. Jesus said, Rise, take up your bed and walk. And immediately, the man was made well and took up his bed and walked.

And that day was the Sabbath. Father, grant to us again, ears to hear and eyes to see and allow us to see the beauty of Jesus Christ.

Who he is, what he's done, what he does, what he will always do. We thank you that he is the God who became man for us. The great healer.

[2 : 23] Bless our time, we ask. Amen. We continue to be in a section with a theme of water.

And John is somewhat symbolic because the way he writes his gospel is a movement through the various parts of the temple or the tabernacle.

And so if you can imagine coming to the basin, the water basin, where it was that they would clean the offerings and they would do a lot of cleansing, it was to demonstrate to the people that they had to be clean in order to come to God.

Because remember, as you move through, you have the water basin, you have the sacrifices, you moved into the actual temple or the tabernacle. And on the one side was the lights and on the other side was the table of showbread and then the altar of incense.

And then you would enter into the very Holy of Holies where the presence of God was, the Ark of the Tabernacle and all that. And so John does that essentially. He takes and he shows to Israel, those who understand, who had a Hebrew background, that this Messiah, that Jesus is the one who is the true Israel, but also he fulfills every aspect of the temple.

[3 : 48] And as we walk through, as we walk through John, we see Jesus fulfilling all these things. So we are in a section where the theme reflects on the water of the labor, meaning the time of purification.

And we see that Jesus himself was baptized in the Jordan. And then there was the ceremonial jars of water, which we looked at. The first sign, the first seven of seven signs.

And then we, if we looked at the previous chapter, Jesus meets the woman at the well. And now we are at a pool or a reservoir.

And the point is, all ways of entering into God's kingdom come by the true washing of the water and by the Spirit through the Messiah.

No other way. We have to be cleansed. So verses two and four, we see Jesus heals at the house of mercy. That was the name this place was given.

[4 : 54] It was called Bethesda, means the house of mercy. And it was a pool there. It was rather elaborate and huge place, approximately 220 feet by 315 feet and somewhere between two and three feet deep.

So it wasn't a place, you know, it wasn't an Olympic pool where you went and you practiced for the Olympics. But rather, it was a place where the water was fed by what they called living water. In other words, a stream, some underwater stream. Some say there was a hot water stream under that, which could have been filled with a lot of minerals.

And people say that because of sulfur and the other minerals, does a person, does a body good? And we know a variety of people have been to places like that and they feel great, presumably healed from their ailments.

And so it was here and it became like a hospital where anybody who had some kind of infirmity, who was sick or ill, would go there in hopes of being healed.

[6 : 03] it was on the northeast section of Jerusalem, only a stone's throw away from the temple. Not too far on the other side was the Mount of Olives and there was a wall in the middle that stood a colonnade and there were four columns or colonnades on each side.

It was apparently a very beautiful place. Well, it's a house of mercy. It's a hospital area, so to speak, where people went to look for healing.

You had all kinds of people who were sick there. And Jews in that day had a very detailed theology about why people got sick, mostly because of demons.

There's two main reasons. One is because of demons. The other reason is because of some sin in their life. If they sinned, they were going to be ill. And so it was, if you recall, there was at one point the disciples asked when Jesus was healing in individuals, who was it that sinned?

Was it this man who sinned? Or was it his parents that sinned? We have a theology in some circles today. And every time you get sick, it's because of some sin you've committed.

[7 : 17] Well, that's not true. We live in a sinful world, in a world that's been affected by sin, but just because you're sick, you have a cold, or you have cancer, doesn't necessarily mean because you've done a specific sin.

Yet they believe that. But they also have this elaborate theology of Satan and the devil. And they said that Satan and the devil who could come in many, many different forms, even in the form of some human being, could make you sick.

Demons could imitate or do anything a prophet or a great man could do. Even good things, which is why they claim that Jesus was demonic. They couldn't give credit to God because such a man couldn't be God's person.

One view of the rabbis was that demons are the souls of the wicked dead that came back to haunt. But demons could be anywhere. You've got to be careful because they could be in breadcrumbs. So you don't want to eat breadcrumbs. They could be there day or night in the dirt, in animals, in the lamp oil, in shadows, and even in diseases.

[8 : 34] So if you're in contact with somebody who has a disease, they'd have a field trip with COVID. Then, if you got sick, it was because you got demonic.

And that's how they fought. And it could be that you didn't wash your hands. If you didn't wash your hands, then you invited demons into you. In fact, for many, many years, the place down the entry point, the checkpoint of the roads where people came out of Egypt and on the road up to Jerusalem, there were Jews and guards there who had to check your hands.

Because if you came in with dirty hands, you were bringing demons from Egypt. And you couldn't come in with dirty hands. So instead of checking for masks, you know, checking, they checked for hands.

And the Talmud even said later on that Jesus learned magic while in Egypt and he was possessed. And apparently when his parents brought him back into Israel, he came with dirty hands.

So that explains all his miracles and his doings. So, they believed demons could take possession and control of people. And this could happen if you walked between two palm trees that were 12 feet or less apart.

[9 : 55] So don't go in between palm trees that are, you know, next time you go to Florida or California, beware of those palm trees. If you borrow drinking water, you could be drinking something that's possessed by a demon.

demon. If you walk over water that was poured out, it could have demons in it. So what you had to do is you had to spit in it in order to get rid of the demons so you could walk over water, you know, through a puddle.

even through the moon's shadow, there were certain trees and objects there were demons. So you can well imagine the fear that was always there and they never knew exactly what happened. And people were not only afraid of the illnesses that other people got, they were afraid of the demons that were there in their presence. It was a very oppressive kind of world to live in. Obviously, Jesus knew better. He wasn't afraid of any of that. But one way you knew you were possessed and that you had a demon or a demon-caused disease is if you had leprosy or rabies, any kind of heart disease, if you were mentally ill or had asthma or other lung problems like pneumonia.

[11:22] So you didn't have much hope unless you went to the priest or somebody, the rabbis, who had these incantations to get these demons out of you. So sickness is a symbol of sin in scripture.

We are all spiritually sick even when we are physically well unless we have the great healer who has healed us. But it's here at the mercy of God that they need, not the waters that would rise up and flow from underneath, not some angel that came and touched the water where they could step into or go jump into in order to become healed.

So then in verse 3 and 5 and 6, we see Jesus chooses one man. He didn't heal everybody. He's going to make a statement through the action that he takes here.

this is the gospel because it's good news that Jesus saw this one man lying there. He saw a man lying over there.

Jesus, the healer, who takes the initiative, who doesn't wait for the man to call out to him. More than likely, he was a beggar as many were because that was the only way that they could make ends meet.

[12:39] They were homeless. They couldn't have a job. They couldn't work for themselves or fend for themselves, especially if they didn't have family. And oftentimes, their own family members would throw them out because they didn't want to have this disease or these demons.

And yet, Jesus comes and he does this for his own glory. He's about the work, always about the work of the Father, the Father who is merciful and gracious.

The Jews, many of the Jews had this idea that if you were ill or sick or demon-possessed, that God looked down upon you and he was going to bring his wrath upon you.

Instead of being healed, which was very rare, God was going to punish you for being ill or sick. And yet, here comes Jesus, the Lord of mercy, to a pool of mercy.

With this great love, he comes and he helps. God loves his people, even in their sins, even in their infirmities, even in their horrible condition, as much as he loves and shows mercy to those who are well.

[14:00] Well, it's a love and an act of mercy that is of God, which we see as for his eternal purpose. But it also brings the symbol of mercy and love and it also teaches us, even today, who this God is, who Jesus is.

Jesus sees the man. He saw the man. And he singled out this lowly, infirm guy to bring his purpose and to shower him with great mercy.

It's not the pool of mercy that brings healing. It's the Jesus, the Lord of mercy, who brings healing. So he chooses someone considered to be sinful.

He chooses someone who was assumed to be faithless, who didn't trust God enough, a hopeless man, a pitiful man. And Jesus chooses a man with an indisputable problem.

This cannot be a hoax. This healing cannot happen by some magic, by some incantation. The guy couldn't walk and he'd been this way for 38 years.

[15:09] He had absolutely no hope except perhaps this pool. So then in verse 6, we see Jesus ask a very important question.

He asked an important question. Do you want to be made well? And one would think he's like, yeah, duh. Of course I do.

Was this impertinent or rude? Well, if you think about it, the man is a beggar and he apparently has enough of his needs met through begging.

But some people are very uncomfortable with any kind of change, even if they're going to be healed. Years ago, there was this dear lady who was chronically ill, had fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue.

She was trying to raise her two teenage children. She had serious asthma and allergies, lived in a house she rented that was filled with lots of mold.

[16:20] She had a dozen birds or so, cats all over the place. She was a housekeeper. She cleaned. So she tried to keep it clean as best she can, but she was always sick.

So the elders and I came up with a plan to send her to a clinic that had helped me years before that. And we said, you know, we will pay for for you to go there, at least to be assessed, to figure out what the problem is.

And maybe for a few more sessions because she didn't have insurance. She didn't want to do it. And yet she reluctantly went.

She got in the car, went down, and they ran all these tests on her. She went back and they told her, yes, you do have chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia.

And we've been able to help people with this. And so here's a regimen and here's some things that we can do to help you. And she came back and she said, I don't want to go.

[17:25] Why don't you want to go? Maybe they will help you. We were willing to pay for it. All she had to have was gas money to get down there and go through the treatment.

She said, I just don't want to do it. Well, it was disheartening that she turned it down. But really, the challenge for her is she didn't want to go because she was so fearful of what might happen if she were healthy again.

She hated change of any sort. So it would be harder for her to go through that than it would be for her to be healed.

She was stuck in her life the way it was. She didn't follow through with it. And I found out that five years later she passed away because her health had gotten so bad.

Was Jesus being rude here? No, Jesus always gets to the heart of things. So his question to the man who was so infirm really got to the heart of who he is.

[18:36] He's not being rude. He is just trying to find out if the man really does want to be healed. And obviously he does. Do you wish for your soul to be healed?

Could have been another question. Do you want your life restored? Do you want to go through the change of life, in life? Do you wish to be well of your sins?

You see, there's so many different questions and yet so many different answers. And I've known many, many people who not only didn't want to go through the change to be healed physically, they also did not want to go through the change to be healed spiritually.

And I believe that's what Jesus is touching upon in essence. It wasn't just physical. Because his whole life is going to be changed radically. And yet Jesus always requires an honest answer to a thoughtful inquiry of your own heart.

So then in verse 7, he listens to the man's excuses and complaints. He answers him, Sir, I have no one, no friend, no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred.

[19:58] He's by himself. He would have to somehow roll himself over there. But with all these however many people, hundreds of people there, how is he going to do that?

He's no friend. Has no friend. No man. No one to help. And yet here comes Jesus, the greatest friend. He has no friend until now.

He answers like many would and many do. If only, you know, things would be better. If only I had a million dollars, my life would change.

If only life was not as hard, life would change. If only things weren't so bad, life would change. If only I had someone to help me, life would change.

And yet, Jesus comes as the one to help. What if the pool really didn't work? They believed it did.

[21:05] Maybe some were helped. And he's putting all of his eggs in one particular basket, hoping that it's going to work.

And for a while, the man is giving his excuses and trying to explain. He has no idea who this Jesus is or what he's going to do. He doesn't know that the man is the man who's going to be a friend.

In the middle of his explanation of why he can't get to the pool, Jesus says to him and tells him to do three things.

Get up, take up your pallet, and walk. Can you imagine that? He doesn't write a prescription, here, go down to your local pharmacy and fill this out and take this for 30 days and you'll be better. He doesn't say if you do this and see a specialist then he will make you better. This is rather immediate. And if you can well imagine, the guy's been there for all these years, he's been crippled all these years, 38 years.

[22 : 18] We're not sure how old he is. And if you can well imagine, you know, the surge of energy and the power, the surge of healing, looking at his legs coming back, you know, that had been atreved, you know, coming back to, you know, to being normal.

Jesus speaks and he even heals the man and the man doesn't express any faith. He had nothing about him to express faith.

Jesus is going to use this to demonstrate his power that with faith or without faith, Jesus will heal. and he heals the man.

He demonstrates as in the beginning of John 1, he is the word. And what the Jews understood about the word from the Old Testament is that when God spoke, things happened.

God's word was his work. And all through the Old Testament, every time God's word spoke and came about, there was new creation, a new world, so to speak, something different.

[23 : 31] Life came out of it. And that's exactly what happens with Jesus. He speaks. His word is healing and he heals the man.

It's only after this that the man responds in faith and obedience because he gets up and takes his pallet and he walks. Wow, wouldn't you like to have a lifeguard like that?

What a precious picture of the good news of a loving God who is so gracious and merciful. God first acts. He regenerates. God then speaks.

In a spiritual sense, you know, he speaks into our lives and he says, arise. May your spirit come alive. You are dead in your trespasses and sins, but you come back to life because he speaks.

Take up your pallet or take up your cross. Take up your life and now walk. It's a wonderful picture of our own spiritual condition.

[24 : 41] Without Christ, without the Lord, you know, we are spiritually sick. We are infirm. We are helpless. We can only do so much to help ourselves, but we can't go any further.

And yet Jesus is the one who heals and he is the one who brings about true healing and salvation and cleansing. Now, what's interesting about this, if you read a little further, you'll find that the Jews who were there, you know, they were very, very upset at Jesus because of what he's doing on the Sabbath.

And they can't stand that this man who had been laying around, who had been infirm for 38 years, he was probably well known. You know, he was the guy who was on the, you know, on I-25 with the sign that you see almost all the time begging for help.

They knew him. The leaders may not have known him, but everybody else probably knew him. And yet, what did they do?

They got angry with the guy that he picked up a pallet and started walking away. But Jesus told him to do that. He was healed.

[25 : 59] I don't know about him, but, you know, if I were in that condition, I'd probably dance. God forbid, dance on the Sabbath. He was healed on the Sabbath. But it's not coincidental because Jesus himself is the Lord of the Sabbath and he does exactly what the Sabbath is about.

It's about grace and it's about refreshment. It's about healing. It's about mercy. It's about kindness. That's what the Sabbath is. It's a picture of that 50 years of Jubilee.

And it's a picture of what the afterlife, what heaven and the new heavens and earth is going to be like. And the Jews who were so fixated on their own rules and regulations who couldn't stand mercy and grace get angry at the man and get angry at Jesus.

And yet, Jesus is fulfilling Psalm 103 where a prophet greater than Moses and Elijah will come who is a priest greater than the high priest who is a king greater than David who's going to come and heal people of their infirmities.

They don't get it. They don't get the Sabbath. The Sabbath was all about rules and regulations. Life was all about rules and regulations. They were hostile. I'm sure they didn't help this man at all.

[27 : 27] May not have given him anything except perhaps a verbal beating. He was a reject. Legalists are like that.

Pharisees are like that. And yet, here we have Jesus who gives a miracle and evidence of kingdom power. He is one with word and deed proclaiming and casting out teaching and healing. and they rejected it. It's not unlike many today who love their rules and regulations, who are so entrenched and ingrained and who are so filled with laws.

But they can't understand grace or mercy or life or healing. Jesus doesn't care about that. He cares about people. He cares about those who are down, the widows, the poor, the children without parents, those who are ill like this man who had been sick and infirm for 38 years.

[28 : 43] You see, the point of healing on the Sabbath is that the Sabbath was a time of recreation, a time of renewal. It was an act of mercy, a day of mercy and Jesus embellishes it.

You know, he makes it a great day of mercy, especially to this man. The work of God, though, always leads to a conflict with the religious leaders.

Always. They don't like grace and mercy. They want, you know, 10 steps to doing this. Five ways to do that.

Three laws, but not Jesus. He does mighty signs of mercy and grace. And instead of a faith response by those seeking to be righteous through their own religion and who ultimately have the strenuous opposition to the Lord, the opposition will grow until Jesus finally meets his death.

What Jesus does on this very day and what he says will cost him his life, he still does it anyway because he loves. Are we looking for health, happiness, prosperity, healing, resolution?

[30 : 02] We can only bank on medicines and doctors and, you know, exercise and good food and, you know, wonderful, wonderful things.

We can only go so far with that. What we ultimately need is Jesus to heal our souls and to look to him who can heal us completely, who can make us whole before God.

it's him who calls us to come to faith and live in faith to arise, to take up whatever we have and to walk in newness of life.

Thank you, Father, that you were the God of mercy who sent your son, Jesus, the great man of grace, the great man of love, the greatest friend we could ever know.

Thank you, Father, that we can be cleansed and that we are cleansed through him. Amen.

[31 : 07] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. He makes a way when there is no way. Does he not? And that's what we'd like to close with today is way make.