

INTRODUCTION

Two ladies met for their 50-year high school reunion. They hadn't seen each other since high school and they were asking about each other's life. One of them said, "Well, my life has turned out perfectly." The other lady said, "What do you mean?"

She said, "We'll, first I married a millionaire, but he died. Then I married a Hollywood director. And he died. Then I married a Baptist preacher. And he died. But now I'm married to an undertaker, so my life has been very well ordered." The other lady said, "Well, what do you mean? It seems like having a millionaire husband die and a Hollywood director die and a Baptist preacher die would be sad. And now you're married to an undertaker? What's so perfect about that?" She smiled and said, "Think about it. One for the money; two for the show; three to get ready; and four to go!"

The truth is that most people's lives don't follow that kind of good pattern. For many of us, we find ourselves like the man in our scripture who spent 38 years of his life in misery. When we started the study of John, I told you John arranges his story around seven different miracles or signs. The first sign was changing water into wine. We talked about the second sign last week when Jesus healed the royal official's son even though He was twenty miles away.

Now think about those first two miracles. Rainwater will naturally become wine, but it takes years for that to happen. In that miracle, we learn that Jesus is Lord over time. He sped up the process to an instant. When Jesus healed the son from twenty miles away, we discover that Jesus is Lord over space. In this miracle, we are going to learn that Jesus is Lord over our disabilities.

John 5:1-16. After this, a Jewish festival took place, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. By the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool, called Bethesda in Aramaic, which has five colonnades. Within these lay a large number of the disabled—blind, lame, and paralyzed.

One man was there who had been disabled for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and realized he had already been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to get well?"

"Sir," the disabled man answered, "I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I'm coming, someone goes down ahead of me."

"Get up," Jesus told him, "pick up your mat and walk." Instantly the man got well, picked up his mat, and started to walk.

Now that day was the Sabbath, and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "This is the Sabbath. The law prohibits you from picking up your mat."

He replied, "The man who made me well told me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" "Who is this man who told you, 'Pick up your mat and walk?'" they asked. But the man who was healed did not know who it was, because Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

After this, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you are well. Do not sin anymore, so that something worse doesn't happen to you." The man went and reported to the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore, the Jews began persecuting Jesus because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

What makes this miracle different is that Jesus initiated contact with the man who was disabled. The man didn't cry out to Jesus, instead Jesus approached him with a question, "Do you want to get well?" That's a question Jesus is asking you today. I want you to imagine Jesus looking into your eyes and asking you, "Do you WANT me to change your life for the better?"

Jesus performed many miracles and He spoke many parables. I have said many times that there is a parable of instruction in every miracle and there is a miracle of instruction in every parable. In this miracle at the pool of Bethesda, we find a pattern of how Jesus can transform our lives. Consider five things that we must do for Jesus to transform us.

1. ADMIT THAT YOU HAVE A PROBLEM

When Jesus asked the disabled man if he wanted to get well we would expect him to say, "Of course!" But instead, he gives Jesus an excuse. He said, "It's not my fault. Whenever the water bubbles up I don't have anyone to put me in the water." They might have had more things to say, but Jesus understood the man had a problem and he wanted to be healed.

This man is a picture of each of us. He was disabled physically. And we are all disabled spiritually. And before Jesus can change you, you must admit you have a problem. But have you noticed how easy it is for us to see problems in other people easier than we see a need in our lives?

It's like the man who went to see a counselor. He had a strip of bacon hanging from each ear and a fried egg on top of his head. The counselor asked, "So how can I help you?" He replied, "It's not me. I'm here to talk about my wife because she is crazy!"

I could ask you the same question Jesus asked this man. "Do you really WANT Jesus to help you?" In order to do that, you must admit that you have a need. You must be willing to say, "Lord, I need help with my marriage. I need help with this habit. I need help with this relationship."

But when it comes to our problems, sometimes we get stuck in denial. And when I say denial, I'm not talking about a river in Egypt.

Even as Christians, we sometimes are blind to sin in our lives. When Jesus was addressing the seven churches in Revelation, He pointed out that the church in Laodicea was blind to their problems. They weren't hot and they weren't cold, instead they were lukewarm, which makes the Lord sick. Jesus said, "So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth. For you say, 'I'm rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,' and you don't realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked." (Revelation 3:16-17 CSB)

These believers were saying, "Hey, Jesus, we're okay. We don't have a problem." And Jesus said, "You don't realize that you are poor, naked, and blind."

In 1935, there were two men in Akron, Ohio who were considered to be hopeless alcoholics. Bill W. and Dr. Bob met each other in a bar and talked about how they wanted to live sober. They became accountable to each other and this eventually led to the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous and the twelve-step recovery process. In 1990, John Baker, who was on the staff of Saddleback Church in California baptized the twelve-step process and developed Celebrate Recovery.

Every Monday night, dozens of people gather in our Student Center for Celebrate Recovery. It's to help anyone who is struggling with hurts, habits, and hang-ups. Actually, I'm speaking tomorrow night at Celebrate Recovery as they are celebrating 15 years of ministry in Green Acres. Every meeting they read through the twelve-steps of recovery. The first step says: We admitted we were powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors, that our lives had become unmanageable. Then they read Romans 7:18 which says, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out."

And the first step before Jesus can transform your life is that you must admit that you have a problem.

2. OBEY THE LORD EVEN IF IT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE

Jesus told this man to do the impossible. He told a lame man to get up and walk. If we didn't know Jesus was God in the flesh, we would say, "How cruel!"

But the words of Jesus also contained miraculous power. The man didn't say, "I can't walk." Even though it seemed impossible, he obeyed the Lord. He stood up, picked up his mat and walked out.

As I study the miracles of Jesus, I'm amazed at how Jesus always individualizes the cure. As we learned in the last miracle, Jesus would sometimes heal people at a distance. At other times, like in this case, He would be with the person being healed. Sometimes Jesus would touch a person. And sometimes, as in this case, He just spoke the word. He would always individualize the cure.

And the same is true when Jesus deals with us. He deals with each of us in a variety of ways. That's because we all have different problems and different needs.

A man walked into a drug store and asked the pharmacist, "Do you have anything to cure hiccups?" The pharmacist said, "Try aisle three." While the man was looking on aisle three the pharmacist snuck up behind him and yelled and hit him with a karate chop on the neck." The man said, "Why in the world did you do that?" The pharmacist said, "I'll bet your hiccups are gone." The man said, "I never had the hiccups. It's my wife out in the car who has hiccups!"

Your problems may not be my problem, and my problem may not be your problem, but Jesus has a cure for every problem. And with every command of Christ, there is the power to obey Him. God gives us the power to do the impossible. All things are possible for God.

Years ago, when I had big Webster's dictionary, I took an X-ACTO knife and I cut the word "impossible" out of the dictionary. Because nothing is impossible with God. But the flip side of that is that we must believe God in order for Him to do the impossible through us. That requires faith. The Bible says, "Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." (Hebrews 11:6 CSB)

As followers of Jesus, we are often told to do things that seem impossible. We are told to forgive people who have wronged us—and that is humanly impossible to do. We are told to love our enemies, and that is humanly impossible to do. It takes faith. You have to believe Him.

What if I told you that I had bought you two fifty-yard line tickets for the Super Bowl next Sunday in Atlanta. All you have to do is go to the Mercedes Benz Stadium and go to the will call window and pick up your tickets before the game. Would you go? It all boils down to one very important factor. Do you believe me or not? Do you trust my word or not? If you believed me, you would go pick up the tickets. If you didn't believe me, those two seats would be left vacant during the game.

Now, please don't go to Atlanta, because I haven't bought you tickets. But in this Word there are many promises and offers that God has given us. Will you claim them? If you believe His word you will. But if you don't believe Him and obey Him, there are a lot of unclaimed blessings because you think it's just not possible. But with God ALL things are possible.

I love the attitude of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. They say, "The difficult we can do immediately. The impossible takes a little longer." Their formal motto is one word in Latin: "Essayons" which means, "Let us try."

As a follower of Jesus, you'll never accomplish the impossible until you attempt the impossible. Jesus told Peter to walk to Him on the water. Peter believed the Word of the Lord, but it wasn't until Peter threw his leg over the side of the boat and put his full weight on the water that the power of God was released.

3. LEAVE YOUR COMFORT ZONE

The disabled man had been there begging for thirty-eight years. Imagine that for a moment. What were you doing thirty-eight years ago? In case you don't want to do the math, that was 1981. Many of you weren't even born then. But for the rest of you, can you imagine being in the same spot, doing the same thing since 1981?

Every year when we go to Jerusalem we visit the pools of Bethesda, which means "house of mercy." We have a wonderful ministry in Tyler Bethesda Medical Clinic named after this place. According to John there were many sick people there. John said that there were blind, lame, and disabled people there. It was common in Jerusalem for disabled people to gather at the same location and ask for alms. That was their welfare system.

We know from ancient literature that there was a protocol among beggars. Those with seniority got the best spots to beg. After 38 years, this man probably had the prime location at the pool of Bethesda. And in one instant, Jesus didn't just tell him to stand up. He told him to stand up, pick up his mat and walk away. His mat reserved his prime location. So by removing his mat, Jesus was literally telling him to leave his comfort zone.

Many scholars believe that's why Jesus asked him, "Do you WANT to be well?" As a disabled beggar, he had a relatively easy life. And there are many people today who really don't want to leave their comfort zone. They have it easy. That's why it's called a comfort zone.

Jamy Skaggs is the chairman of our Deacon Body. He shares my burden for God to send a spiritual awakening to our church and community. He has organized our deacons into prayer teams to pray for revival. Over this past year, Jamy has been telling our deacons that we face two dangers as a church. And I believe he is on target. The first danger is comfort because it leads to complacency. The second danger is pride because it leads to self-sufficiency. In our church, we have such a fine staff team, and such amazing ministries that it's easy to grow comfortable. But the danger of that, is that it can produce apathy and complacency. We begin to take God's blessings for granted. And because we are such a large church, and such a generous church in giving to missions, if we aren't careful that can produce a sense of pride. And if we don't humble ourselves before God we will begin to think that we are the ones who have done all this—and we can forget to depend on the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible reminds us many times that we shouldn't trust our abilities or trust our own understanding. We must trust the Lord completely. The writer of Proverbs wisely said, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6 CSB)

Are you willing to leave your comfort zone to trust God completely? God didn't save you to make you comfortable, but you make you obedient. You'll never go on a mission trip if you're not willing to leave your comfort zone. You'll never start tithing until you are willing to leave your comfort zone. You'll never start traveling in prayer until you are willing to leave your comfort zone. You'll never vocally share your faith with others until you're willing to leave your

comfort zone. You'll never volunteer to serve the Lord if you aren't willing to leave your comfort zone.

4. TURN AWAY FROM YOUR PAST

After receiving a miracle, the paralyzed man left the pool. And later in the day, Jesus found him in the Temple. No doubt he was there to pray and thank God for his healing. Jesus told him, "Stop sinning, or something worse will happen to you."

The question Jesus asked the man at the pool wasn't "Do you want to walk?" He asked him, "Do you want to get well." That word "well" means wholeness. The man was walking and carrying his mat, but Jesus had to tell him how to be well, to be spiritually healed. He said, "Stop your sinning." What did Jesus mean by that? Let me make three observations.

First, Jesus wasn't teaching that this man was lame because of some specific sin he had committed. That was a common belief back then, and it is a mistake people still make. Some people look at someone who is suffering and they think maybe this person did something bad and they are getting what they deserve.

It is true that all sickness and suffering in the world is because of the presence of sin. But Jesus never taught that a person was suffering because of some individual sin that was committed. We know this because when we get to John 9 the disciples ask Jesus, "Who sinned, this man, or his parents that he was born blind?" Jesus replied, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned. But he is blind so that the power of God can be demonstrated."

Second, what did Jesus mean when He said, "Stop sinning or something worse will happen to you?" What's worse than being lame for 38 years? That's easy. Spending eternity separated from God in a place the Bible calls hell. Jesus never condemned people as sinners, but He never condoned sin either. His message was always, "Unless you repent, you will all perish. The word "repent" means to turn around. When you come to Christ, you turn from your sin and turn to Christ. If you never repent, something worse than being paralyzed will happen to you.

Third, Jesus was telling this man that he was no longer defined by the disabilities of his past, instead, he had a new life in front of him. He had a new reason to live. He wouldn't be returning to the pool and the place of a beggar.

And Jesus tells us the same thing. When you come to Christ, you experience a new reason to live as well. Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62 CSB)

Any good farmer who has plowed a field knows that if he wants straight rows, he must keep looking ahead. If he turns his head and looks behind, he is going to veer off from a straight line.

To think of it another way, when you drive a car, there is a large glass and a small glass in front of you. The small glass is the rearview mirror and the larger glass is the windshield. If you

spend all your time looking in the rearview mirror, chances are you are headed for an accident. You've got to spend the vast majority of your time looking at the road ahead and just occasionally glancing at the rearview mirror. The past is a great place to visit, but you don't want to live there.

5. TELL OTHERS HOW JESUS HAS CHANGED YOU

After discovering the identity of Jesus, he went to the religious leaders and said, "Jesus is the one who made me well." He didn't say, "Jesus is the one who made me walk." He used the same word, to be made whole.

Jesus told the man, "Stop sinning." The religious leaders said, "Stop walking." But in the end, the man said, "I'm not going to stop talking. Jesus is the one who has healed me."

This poor disabled man did nothing to deserve his miracle. It was by the grace of Jesus that he could walk. And we can do nothing to deserve the gift of salvation. It is by the grace of Jesus.

Do you remember the story in Mark 5 about the man who was so tormented by demons that he lived among the tombs and had to be restrained with chains? After Jesus delivered him, the Bible says the people found the man sitting and of a sound mind. He was well. The man begged Jesus to let him go with him. But Jesus gave him some better advice. He said, "Go home to your own people, and report to them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you." (Mark 5:19 CSB)

Wouldn't you have loved to have heard the testimony of the formerly-disabled man in Jerusalem? "For 38 years I sat by the pool of Bethesda. I was helpless. I was hopeless. Then one day Jesus came along and since that day, everything in my life has changed." Fast-forward another two years. Jesus has been to the cross and risen from the dead. He has ascended back to the Father. One hundred and twenty believers are praying together in an upper room. I think this former disabled man was part of that group. Because Jesus didn't just make him walk. He made him well.

Just as he told others about how Jesus changed him, we should be telling people something like this, "What a wonderful change in my life has occurred since Jesus came into my heart!"

So of all the sick people there at the pool that day, why did Jesus choose this one man? We don't know why. I but I could also ask, of all the people in the world, why Jesus chose to save a little boy named David who was living in South Alabama in 1962? I don't know why, I'm just glad He did. It should be the same for you.

We used to sing a song by Andre Crouch that said, "I don't know why Jesus loved me. I don't know why he cared. I don't know why He sacrificed His life, Oh, but I'm glad, so glad He did!"

OUTLINE

1. ADMIT THAT YOU HAVE A PROBLEM

"So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth. For you say, 'I'm rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,' and you don't realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked." *Revelation 3:16-17 CSB*

2. OBEY THE LORD EVEN IF IT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE

"Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." *Hebrews 11:6 CSB*

3. LEAVE YOUR COMFORT ZONE

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight." *Proverbs 3:5-6 CSB*

4. TURN AWAY FROM YOUR PAST

"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." *Luke 9:62 CSB*

5. TELL OTHERS HOW JESUS HAS CHANGED YOU

"Go home to your own people, and report to them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you." *Mark 5:19 CSB*

— MESSAGE DISCLAIMER —

These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations and/or use material that is not under copyright. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material stimulate your own Spirit-driven preparation—*it is never intended as a substitute for your own study of Scripture.*

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, it is good scholarship (not to mention the right thing to do) to cite the source. If you are teaching, you may simply preface your remarks by saying something like: **“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”** This simple citation also applies to any work you may publish, too, as I routinely publish my material in books that are protected by copyright.

This careful effort on your part may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you. I trust you will find that additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners.

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas*
