

Communion

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[0 : 00] Could you turn with me now to that passage that we read in John's Gospel, chapter 5, and particularly words in verse 8. John 5, verse 8, Then Jesus said to him, Get up, pick up your mat, and walk.

Jesus tells us to do what we think is impossible. He told this badly disabled man to get up and walk, and yet the man did it. Notice that John stresses here that what he's talking about is real. It really happened at a particular time and place. He mentions the feast time, and he mentions the Pool of Bethesda.

And you know, there was actually no evidence that the Pool of Bethesda ever existed, except it's mentioned in the Bible, until the year 1888, when archaeologists actually discovered it in Jerusalem, and excavations demonstrated that it contained the five covered areas as described by John.

So, what we're talking about here is something real. This is a real man who met the real Jesus in a real place at a real time. Jesus, tonight, tells us to get up and walk.

[1 : 38] He tells us to get up and walk spiritually. He tells us to repent, to turn around, to change direction, to stop running away from God, and instead turn to Christ and trust in Him.

All things that are absolutely impossible in our own strength. And yet, millions upon millions of people down through history and throughout the world have done just that.

He tells us as Christians to get up and walk, to get up from our lethargy, perhaps, or perhaps our disobedience, or our backsliding, or our disappointment and disillusionment and discouragement. He tells us to get up and walk, all impossible by ourselves. But millions of Christians every day in the most desperate circumstances sometimes get up and walk, and walk the Christian walk.

Let's look at this man's encounter with Jesus and see what we can learn for ourselves. And so, the first question we have to ask ourselves is this. What's stopping you?

[2 : 49] What's stopping you getting up from your sin, or your spiritual depression, or your backsliding, or your lethargy? Well, what was stopping this man? Well, he was lame.

He was crippled. He was paralyzed. Now, of course, it was believed that the Pool of Bethesda had healing powers. He was, whether supernatural in some way, as is hinted at in the footnote you'll see here in the bottom of the New International Version page there, or perhaps something natural.

But anyway, people believed that it had healing powers. So, someone obviously took him there every day, but obviously couldn't stay to help him, and he couldn't get down to the pool himself. Now, obviously, this was a man that normal medicine couldn't help, so he was looking for this kind of miraculous cure, maybe in some kind of superstitious way. But his very disability prevented him from getting the supposed cure.

He couldn't get down into the water first. So, it seemed an absolutely hopeless case. So, what about you tonight? Is this a picture of you spiritually?

[4 : 06] What is stopping you getting up and walk for the Lord Jesus? Well, it's true of us all by nature that we're paralyzed spiritually.

It's clear that Jesus' real concern for this man was with his spiritual condition, because in verse 14 he says to the man, Stop sinning. So, he could quite clearly see that the real root of this man's problem was a spiritual one.

And it's as if his physical paralysis was like a living parable or a visible parable of his spiritual condition. And in verse 21 of this chapter, Jesus says, For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

So, he's talking there about how the Father will raise people from the dead physically, but Jesus here and now is giving life, giving spiritual life, giving eternal life to whom he is pleased to give it.

And in verse 24, You see, Jesus very quickly moves from the healing, the physical healing of this man's paralysis, to talking about the fact that we are spiritually paralyzed.

[5 : 34] We're spiritually dead, as the Apostle Paul puts it in Ephesians chapter 2. Until we become Christians, we are dead spiritually. Ephesians 2 verse 1 says, As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.

He's writing to the Ephesian church there and he says, That's what you were before you came to know the gospel. Now, tonight you may be aware that there's something wrong.

You may be thinking that your own efforts can put things right in your life. Like this man, thinking that somehow or other he was going to be able to get down into that pool.

But are we really facing up to the radical nature of what's wrong with us? That by nature we're spiritually dead. But tonight you may be a Christian.

But there's something that's not right. There's something that's paralyzing you spiritually. Something that's disabling you spiritually. Stopping you from all you could be for Jesus.

[6 : 43] It may be the fact that you've never openly professed your faith in the Lord Jesus. We have to believe in our hearts, yes. But we have to confess with our mouths too.

And that can be very spiritually debilitating. If we believe in Jesus in our hearts, but we've never made it known. It's holding us back spiritually.

It's paralyzing us. Not making us as useful as we ought to be in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. It may be that you've fallen into sin.

Instead of resisting temptation, you've given into it. And maybe you've developed a sinful habit. A critical spirit perhaps.

Lustful thoughts perhaps. Or a despondent attitude. In some way you've given in to temptation. And you've allowed sin to rule over you. Perhaps tonight you're backslidden.

[7 : 43] And no matter what you do, you can't seem to shake yourself out of it. Well, the first step is to realize that we can't do it ourselves.

Just like this man, we can't do it ourselves. So next we notice a question that Jesus asked the man. He said at the end of verse 6 to him, Do you want to get well? Now you may think that's a very strange question that Jesus asked this poor man.

Here he is, paralyzed, disabled. Do you want to get well? You might think, well, of course the man wants to get well. But it's a very important question. Because this is the crucial question, isn't it? Do we really want to change? How long has this situation been going on with this man? This man had been there 38 years.

[8 : 48] How long have you been trying to sort out things yourself? Maybe 38 years, maybe longer, maybe not as long. There could have been a tendency for this man to become fatalistic.

He was just going there every day. And it had just become a way of life. He knew he wasn't going to get into that pool. But he just kept on going there.

It was all he could do. What about you tonight? Have you just come to accept your situation and think that there just can't be any improvement?

There can't be any change. You become used to disappointment. You're disillusioned spiritually. Well, what did this man reply to Jesus' question?

Well, he didn't actually give a direct answer to Jesus' question. And that's probably because he kind of misunderstood it. He maybe thought that Jesus was questioning his desire to come there every day to be healed by this pool.

[9 : 50] Because, as he said, he'd been there 38 years and never got healed. So he explains why that was. It was not because of any lack of desire on his part.

It was because he simply had nobody to take him down to the pool. And there's a challenging question for ourselves. What about us? Do we really want to get up and walk?

Do we really want to be changed spiritually? Do we want to come alive spiritually? Or are we quite content the way things are? Have we got kind of used to it? And we don't think anything's going to change.

Are we really serious about this? Are we really serious about the Christian life? Are we really serious about faith in Christ? Or have our attempts at self-improvement just become a kind of way of life?

Or every so often we think we should turn over a new leaf and we try something and then we go back to the old ways. Or maybe we've just become fatalistic. We're waiting for some kind of

emotional experience perhaps.

[10:57] Or some kind of supernatural phenomenon. Or some overwhelming incident. Or something. That is going to somehow shake us out of this situation.

What if these kind of things never come? Or what if the opportunity comes to you really as a still small voice?

Maybe in the words of this text tonight. Get up and walk. The question is do we really want to get up and walk? Do we really want to get well?

Do we really want to be made whole? Well how can we? How can we be made whole? How can we be healed spiritually? If all my efforts have failed, how can I get up and walk?

Well we need to realize that of course what is impossible for us is possible for God. Ultimately it's not about you. It's about Jesus.

[11:58] It's not about your efforts. It's not about how strong or how weak or whatever you may be. It's about Jesus. And that's how this man's whole situation, whole life was turned around.

That's how he was able to get up and walk physically. The first thing we notice is this. That Jesus saw him. In verse 6. Jesus saw him.

That doesn't mean that Jesus just kind of looked at him in passing. He saw him. He kind of focused on him. He took an interest in him. He was concerned for him. Particularly when he heard how long he had been in this condition.

In other words, Jesus, as we read so often, had compassion on this man. How often we read that Jesus had compassion on people.

The poor, the needy, the sick. And he healed or he helped in some way. And this ties in with the whole reason for which Jesus came into the world.

[12:57] God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. It's out of this great love of the triune God that is expressed in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's this great love that is the transforming power in this situation. Romans chapter 5 verse 8. God demonstrates his own love for us in this.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Or in Galatians chapter 2 verse 20, Paul says in a very personal way, he says, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. It's only God's love in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ that can change us. It's only this amazing, atoning love of the Lord Jesus that can change us from being a sinner under condemnation to be a sinner saved by grace.

So that if tonight you're wondering about this thing, the Christian faith, or perhaps you're drawn to this Christian reality, this is how you must come, trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and trusting in his great work that he has performed on behalf of sinners.

[14:17] And it's only this great love also that can change you from being a cowardly or lethargic or backslidden Christian or whatever to being a Christian on fire for the Lord who redeemed you.

It's the same power of love. And here Jesus speaks a word of power in verse 8. He says to the man, get up, pick up your mat and walk.

Now notice Jesus didn't say, you're healed, now get up and walk. He didn't sort of heal the man first and then tell him to get up and walk.

He told the man, this disabled man, this man who was powerless, he told him to get up and walk. And it was only as the man obeyed Jesus that the healing came.

It's an amazing thing, isn't it? The gospel comes to us as a command to be obeyed, to repent and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[15:29] It comes to us like that before we know Christ, before we become Christians. It comes as this command. And it comes as a command of power.

It comes in the same way to us as Christians. When we may be in a backslidden state or something's wrong in our lives, it's the same gospel that will heal us because it's the same Christ. And it's the same work of Christ. It's the same death of Christ that will heal us. The message comes to us, repent and believe. The message comes, get up and walk.

And you only know the empowerment as you do what Jesus commands. His word comes to us as Christians as commands as well.

Love each other as I have loved you. Love your neighbor as yourself. Go and make disciples. And it's only as we attempt to obey these commands that we receive the power to do it.

[16:31] As long as you stay sitting not doing it, you're not going to get the power to do it. But it's only as you struggle to get to your feet that you rise up and walk.

As the word comes to you, you have, as it were, that split-second choice to obey or to refuse. This man heard the command of Jesus.

He obeyed it, although he knew it was impossible. He knew he had never done it before. But the empowering words of Jesus enabled him to respond.

Of course, faith is at the heart of this obedience. You must never try to make a great divorce between faith and obedience. It's because the man trusted Christ.

He trusted this word of Christ that he acted on it. There was something about Jesus. There was something about his concern for him. There was something about his love to him.

[17:33] There was something about the way he spoke authoritatively and with power that made this man believe, yes, I can do this. He didn't even know who Jesus was.

We're told that in verse 13. When people asked him, why are you carrying your mat? He said, the man who healed me told me to do it. But I don't know who he is.

And that tells us that his knowledge and faith were really most inadequate, weren't they? He didn't know anything else about Jesus apart from he had met him, he had encountered him, he had experienced his love, he had experienced his command, and he had obeyed it.

The point is that however little he knew of Jesus in that encounter, he acted on it.

You may know a lot more about Jesus than this man. You may know a lot more about faith. You may know a lot more about theology.

[18:39] But the question is, have you acted upon it? Have you acted upon that knowledge? Have you exercised what faith actually is rather than just thinking about it?

Have you trusted and obeyed? Jesus didn't only tell him to get up and walk, but he told him to get up, take up your mat and walk.

In other words, the little mat thing that the man was lying on told him to take it up and walk. So go off with it. Why did Jesus do that?

What was the point? That wasn't essential to his healing. In fact, it was quite controversial. The religious leaders had all sorts of rules about the Sabbath.

This happened on the Sabbath day. They had all sorts of rules as to what could be carried and what couldn't be carried. And one of the things you couldn't carry was your bed or what you were lying on. Verse 10, we're told, The law forbids you to carry your mat.

[19:50] In fact, there's no such law in the Old Testament. There's no such law in the Bible. But the way people are, they invent rules and regulations in terms of religious ideas.

They had turned the law of God, which was for man's good, into something that was for his harm. Remember, Jesus had to say to them, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. And you see, there are still religious leaders today who will change what God has said.

There are religious leaders today who will tell you that the gospel forbids you to tell people of all nationalities and cultures and sexualities and religions that they are sinners and that they need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved.

And in fact, that is the only way in which they can be saved. People say you mustn't tell people that. Although it's quite clearly what Jesus says.

[20:58] It's quite clearly what God says in his word. Or they will say that believing that God sent his son to die in the place of sinners is child abuse.

You know, that God the Father should send his son to the cross. That's child abuse. This whole thing about atonement for sin, that's all horrific.

Yet that's what Jesus tells us. I've not come to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many. This is the blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Just as this man faced opposition when he did what Jesus told him to do, so we too will face opposition. Because these are the things that Jesus commands.

This is what Jesus' word says. And if we are to get up and walk as a Christian, we must believe and obey. In obeying Jesus, the man had become a kind of spiritual revolutionary.

[22:12] And that's what we have to become if we are to follow Jesus. The teachings of this book are revolutionary today. Many people don't know it.

They don't know the first thing about what the Bible actually teaches. They have all kinds of vague ideas and there's rumors out there as to what the Bible says and completely misapprehensions of it. But they don't know this amazing, powerful, revolutionary message. But when they do come to know some of it, there can be opposition to it. But we have to become spiritual revolutionaries if we are to follow Jesus.

And I think that this man demonstrated the spiritual revolution in his life when Jesus told him to stop sinning and he immediately went on to testify about Jesus in verse 15.

Now, he may have been a bit naive, not realizing the vicious hostility of Jesus' enemies towards Jesus.

[23 : 15] But I don't agree with those commentators who think that this man was somehow betraying Jesus because this created more trouble for Jesus, what this man said.

After all, Jesus hadn't commanded him to keep quiet about what had happened. He simply told what Jesus had done for him. And rather than that, it led to Jesus having the opportunity to expound his relationship with his father and the necessity of faith in himself for eternal life.

Verse 19 and what follows. So, this man had become truly a spiritual revolutionary, running against the grain of his society, his community at that time, but out of love for the Lord Jesus, testifying to what Jesus had done for him.

So, what about ourselves tonight? Are we prepared to be spiritual revolutionaries for Jesus? Is it the problem that we really haven't expressed our faith?

Maybe because we haven't got confidence in our faith ourselves. Maybe it's because we lack self-confidence, but that's not what we need. It's not self-confidence.

[24 : 30] It's confidence in Jesus and in his word. And if we've got that, then we can truly be spiritual revolutionaries for him. So, the question for us tonight is, are we in some way paralyzed spiritually?

Unable to change our lives? We know things are wrong. Whether we're a Christian or whether we're not yet a Christian, we know things are wrong. And maybe we've tried to change things, but nothing seems to happen.

Maybe tonight you've no assurance that you are a Christian. Or maybe you're in a backslidden or discouraged or despondent state. The word of Jesus comes to us all tonight.

Get up, pick up your mat, and walk. And it comes to you in love and in power. And it demands a response. And it's only on the basis of that response to the great love of the Lord Jesus Christ that we are entitled to be a member of his family and to sit at his table and to sit down together with our fellow Christians.

It's only on the basis of this gospel. It's only on the basis of this powerful, loving word. Get up and walk that we can come to him. I pray that maybe so for every one of us.

[25 : 44] Let's pray. Our gracious and loving Heavenly Father, we ask that you would bless your own word to every one of us here tonight. Every one of us, we have to confess that we have sinned against you.

Every one of us has to confess that we struggle to do what is good and to avoid what is evil. Every one of us has to recognize that we can't change ourselves.

Enable us to realize that Jesus and Jesus alone can change and transform us. Teach us to come to him. Oh, we may have come to him a long time ago, but maybe we've forgotten that we have to come every day, that we have to return every time, and he is ever ready to receive and to heal us. We thank you, gracious Lord, for your great grace to us in Christ. And so we ask that you would bless every one of us, whatever our spiritual condition tonight, that you would heal us and help us, save us, transform us, forgive us, renew us.

For we know that all of this is available to us in the great, powerful work of the Lord Jesus. And it's upon that work that we'll focus this weekend as we think of the great things that Jesus has done for us.

[27 : 07] So exalt the name of Jesus among us and enable us to exalt his name. We ask it all for his sake. Amen.