



# Auburn Presbyterian Church

*Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual*

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## **“Do You Want to Be Healed?”**

**Matthew 9:27-31; Mark 9:14-29; John 5:1-20**

**(Healing Stations Available after Service)**

Last week, we finished our study of First Timothy. Copies of those Bible messages are on the back Usher’s Table. Today, we want to give you some experience with our healing ministry, similar to what we do on “third Fridays” here at 7 p.m. Just like on those Fridays, we’ll learn from Jesus, the Great Physician, through brief snapshots of his healing ministry. Then we will set up three Healing Stations where you may come, as we conclude the service, for healing for yourself or for another.

Open your Bibles first to Matthew’s gospel, the first book in the New Testament. Find chapter 9, and listen with me for God’s Word TO US TODAY, as I read these words aloud.  
*[Matthew 9:27-31]*

Now find the next book in the New Testament—Mark—and find chapter 9 there also. Listen for the Word of God, in verses 14-29. *[text]*

And our final Bible passage for the morning is from John’s gospel—two books later—as Jesus meets a man at a famous pool in Jerusalem. This is in John, chapter 5, starting at verse one. Again—listen for God’s voice. *[Jn 5:1-20]*

When we pick up our Bibles on Friday nights, generally I pick only one text, and not three. But I wanted to bring all these before you so that we could hear the variety of situations Jesus met, and how he performed his healings

What did YOU notice?

In Matthew 9 with the two blind men, Jesus seemed to base their healing on their faith; he asked them, “Do you believe I can [heal you]?” In Mark 9, the faith of the father is front-and-center, and the father wants to believe Jesus can do it, but he can’t quite get there. He asks for help for his own trust, as well as healing for his son. And there’s “faith” at issue in the John 5 text, also.

This healing pool in Jerusalem was like Lourdes, in France, where since the Middle Ages God has seemed to more likely grant miracles. And just like Lourdes, many people came to this Jerusalem pool for healing. Some of the old manuscripts have a verse after verse 3, which says, “and they waited for the moving of the waters. From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease he had.” Modern translations are almost evenly split about whether to include this verse or not, but this “extra” verse does seem to explain a bit more why this poor man has been left out of healing, for we must assume he had come again and again to the pool, only to be edged out again and again by some other seeker. Once the “chance of the day” was gone, he would crawl off to beg on some street corner, for that was the only way he could eat. What a terrible life! It’s like the pagan myth of Tantalus, who was punished for his gross

misbehavior by being made to stand in a pool of water beneath a fruit tree with low branches. Whenever he reached up for fruit, the branches raised up and took away his only food from his grasp. Whenever he bent down to get a drink, the water receded before he could get any. And over his head towered a great boulder, threatening to fall at any moment. It is from this story that our word *tantalizing* comes.

How long can you come to a healing place, when you know someone else is going to get the one and only prize? If you were spending money on Lottery tickets, and you knew someone else would always win, you'd stop buying the tickets, right? What keeps the Lottery going is the misplaced hope that your numbers will hit that week. But hoping for a cash windfall is not the same as living with a crippling condition for 38 years. Would you give up, or would you keep coming to the pool, in hopes THIS day, you might make it into the water in time?

Now, in light of all this, what do you make of Jesus' question to this poor man, "Do you want to get well?" Isn't it insulting to ask such a thing of this cripple? Jesus must know where he is—at the pool where healing often happens. Wouldn't it be obvious from location alone, that this man wanted healing? And then, if Jesus was looking at the fellow, he saw he was lying on a mat—another clue. Most likely, this man's bones were malformed and his legs wasted, if it's been 38 years since he's walked. What could be more clear? OF COURSE this man wants to get well!

But perhaps Jesus' question is deeper than we suspect. Could there be some reasons why this man might possibly NOT want to get well? What would "getting well" mean for him?

"Getting well" would mean a major change in his life. Think about it. For a long time—perhaps nearly every day for 38 years—this man has had one item on his daily "do-list"—"get to the pool early". It's all he knows. His field of vision, his imagination, has shrunk to this one thing. If he is healed, then what will he do? He hasn't made decisions of his own, for years.

Did you know that men and women who are institutionalized for a long time—say, in prison—often have a very hard time adjusting to life "on the outside" for this very same reason? In their institution, others made every decision for him. No puzzle about what outfit to wear—new day, same uniform. Choices in the food? Not likely. Scheduling one's day? Already handled. When convicts complete their sentence, suddenly there's a rush of decisions to make, and these decisions are often difficult.

For example, a sex offender is released. He has very little money. To conform to the law, he must live nearly a half-mile from any school or park, and register with his parole officer. Take out a map sometime, and see how hard it is to locate an area in a typical city that meets these standards, and then imagine what it costs to rent a room there. (I've not even mentioned the lures of former criminal friends, or drug and alcohol habits, or other handicaps.) No wonder the recidivism rate for all classes of adult convicts is something like 80%. Our "pool man" might not want to get well because suddenly he'd have to make decisions he perhaps had never made as an adult.

But there's another life-change that might make him hesitate to answer Jesus' question. As a healthy man, suddenly he would not be able to beg for donations anymore. As a cripple, people would usually have some sympathy for him, and would throw him a coin now and then. But who is going to support a healthy man, who ought to be out working? (Leave aside for the moment that this man probably has no marketable adult job skills.) Can he even imagine how he's going to make a living, if he cannot beg? Maybe he'd better stay "sick", or "disabled".

Now let's look at this man's relationships. "Getting well" for him would mean a major change in those relationships. Let's start with his family. Perhaps long ago they became burned-out caregivers, and if he's made well, they might take out their suppressed resentment by demanding he "pay them back for their support all these years". That would be an impossible demand. And what about getting a job—at 50 (I'm just guessing his age), with no marketable skills? --

"Excuse me, sir. I'm looking for work." "Yeah? What can you do? What have you done so far?" What's our 'pool man' going to say? It might be embarrassing, or demeaning--does he really want to face that?

You can see that our 'pool man' has probably settled into a life where he kinda knows his way. It ain't a great life, but he is getting by—for at least 38 years. "Getting well" would mean facing the stress of the unknown, confronting change that cannot be known in advance but will surely be challenging, without any guarantee of success. So, "Do you want to get well?" is a great question for him!

Thomas Edison was deaf but only a few of his friends were aware that in his case deafness was more psychological than physical. Once a specialist in diseases of the ear called upon Mr. Edison and unfolded a plan of treatment which he was sure would restore his hearing. When asked if he would give permission for the treatment, however, Mr. Edison refused.

"What I am afraid of," he said, "is that you would be successful. Just think what a lot of stuff I'd have to listen to that I don't want to hear! To be a little deaf and be the only one who knows just how deaf you are has its advantages. I prefer to let well enough alone."

Before we can be healed we have to want to. Some may see more advantages in their illness than in their health.

When Jesus asked our "pool man", "Do you want to get well?", that was a 'yes' or 'no' question. But the man doesn't answer yes or no; instead, he explains why he can't get well on his own--he has no one to put him in the water ahead of the rush. Maybe he's hoping Jesus will give him "a lift"?!

Jesus brushes aside excuses and explanations. He orders the man, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." No preparation—this must have been a total surprise to our 'pool man'. I imagine this startled look on him. Then, without thinking, he moves a leg. He moves a leg--and it moves! He moves his other leg. He flexes his ankles and feet and toes and knees and hips. He is breathing hard and fast, suddenly consumed by this unfolding intimate miracle. He hasn't tried to rise in years, and he's almost not sure how. Slowly, with shaking and uncertainty, like a mare's colt newly born, he rises, and tests it out. "Am I really standing?" he wonders. He looks around—the world sure looks different from 'up here'! He takes a step, turns a little. Summoning his courage, he stoops down to his mat, not sure he'll ever get up. But he grasps his mat, and stands again! He hugs the mat, and walks slowly away from the pool, praising God for this miracle. Meanwhile, Jesus has melted into the crowd.

Each 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday Healing Service, we look in on a healing in Scripture, and learn more about God's healing. We've been at this for more than a year, and we're still discovering more. We've learned we cannot reduce God's healing to a formula; the conditions are too varied to be so simplified. *It's the client's faith. No, wait, it's the faith of their kin, or their friends. No, wait, it's an act of God that brushes aside excuses. No, wait... you get the idea.*

Well, fine. The Bible is wonderful. I might even believe it is an accurate record of God doing amazing things in those days. But why do healings here? Why now? We don't expect such things these days.

Why not? In Matthew 10:1, Jesus gives his disciples authority to cure every disease. In John 14:12, Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." (NIV)

In John 20, Jesus appears after his resurrection to his disciples and says, "'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.'" <sup>22</sup> And with that, [Jesus] breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (v. 22-24, NIV) It was the Holy Spirit that brought about the healings, as we understand it. Jesus was so attuned to God that he was doing only what he got from his Father (John 5:19); Jesus spoke and acted out his Father's will as he got it.

Jesus' followers have the authority to heal, and we have his command to heal. We don't have the power to heal. Every healing depends upon God.

We simply listen to God as best we can, and in His Name, command the healings. Even saying it that way is misleading. It's more like we are announcing the healing that God does, using "*command language*". We were given a command, so we use command language, too. Our authority comes from the one who gave us this command.

But, "Does it work?" Well, just as we can't reduce Jesus' healing ministry to a formula, so we can't reduce the results to a predictable "product". The very question is a demand that God do our bidding and produce statistically-significant change that can be measured in terms we can understand. Hmm. Who's in charge now?

The "Does it work?" question. . . *do you notice how it seeks to make God predictable?* If God is predictable, then I can have greater confidence in what will happen when I come and ask for healing. We'd like to take the uncertainty away. We'd like to avoid taking a risk, when the outcome is not in our hands.

Look how badly we want to control this, control God.

Coming to God always involves risk, and Jesus commonly encouraged people to take reasonable risks with, and for, God. There is no risk-free approach to God. That's the truth.

I can tell you our Healing Teams' experiences (and some other time, I can share with you the experience of others who have taken the risk to believe our Boss and do what our Boss says). In our experience, we have seen people healed and have received healing reports on the forms we send home with every "client". Not all have been healed. Some got healing in another part of their lives they did not expect. Like the cripple at the pool who was asking Jesus to get him into the pool before the others, he didn't get what he asked for. Instead of taking him into the water, Jesus commanded his healing. He was dry-healed, so to speak—a big surprise for him. There are a lot of surprises, when we come into contact with God. If we trust God—*Ah, there's the rub!*—if we trust God, the surprises are good, indeed.

That's enough for today. This morning we have just scratched the surface of exploring the healing God gives. There is so much more.

Now, it's up to you. Will you take the risk? You might consider, how little you have to lose. If it doesn't work, you still have receive the care and attention of other people, and we all could use more of that. What's really at stake for you? Pride? Do you have no need for more of God?

Perhaps you are deeply connected to someone who is not here today, but who needs healing. Like we see in other healings Jesus did, you also can ask for healing for them. Will you allow God to heal you, to heal them, in His own way?

Then here's what to do: while we sing our last song, I will take light from the Christ candle to the candles at our Healing Stations, and our Healing Teams of two will take their places. After I share God's blessing, decide what you want to do. Most will leave the room and enjoy each other's company, as usual, outside. Nothing wrong with that! Another group of you will want to come for healing--for yourself, or for another. And, some, we hope, will remain in the room, sit down again, and pray throughout this time for the healing that God will do here—pray to bind the Enemy from interfering with our minds and hearts, and pray for powerful miracles this morning and in the days to come.

And with this Healing Ministry, we conclude our service this morning. On the third Fridays, like a week from this Friday, you have another opportunity to come, yourself, and perhaps bring a friend or family member who needs healing, so that God's people may minister that healing in the powerful name of Jesus.

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on September 9, 2007, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]