

## John 5:1-14

### The Blessing of Being Made Whole

*Wilt thou be made whole? – v. 6*

As we follow Jesus to the pool of Bethesda, I can't help but wonder if the scene at this pool resembled a hospital from the days of antiquity. We're told in v. 5 about a pool that was evidently not far from sheep gate which would have been one of the Northern gates of the temple. We're further told about 5 porches that could found at the scene. Other English versions translate it *five roofed colonnades*. Commentators suggest that these porches or colonnades were like shelters which could hold a large number of sick people and could protect them from the heat and the rain. Add to this scene the fact that this pool was called Bethesda, which means *house of mercy* and it's not hard to envision in this scene a hospital the way you would have found a hospital in those days. It's interesting to note that many modern day hospitals utilize the name *Bethesda* in their title, including a well known hospital in Maryland which is the *Bethesda Naval Hospital*.

This scene in Jn. 5 certainly has some things in common with hospitals, most notably *a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, and withered*. I should clarify a matter about this text this morning before we get too far into our study and that is the matter of whether or not v. 4 belongs in the New Testament. Some modern English versions omit the verse altogether while some others include it but with some kind of footnote that reads something like this: *The best and most ancient manuscripts do not include this verse*. You should always keep in mind that when you see such footnotes that you're reading the opinion of some men. As a matter of fact most Greek manuscripts do contain the verse, these ancient and so called best manuscripts notwithstanding.

Perhaps the thing that would tempt some to wonder about the authenticity of the verse is the unusual scene that's presented by the verse. Could it really be that there was in existence at the time of Christ such a pool that had such supernatural medicinal qualities about it that people could be healed who went into it? And if that was the case, could it be that the pool only contained this supernatural power at particular intervals which would be when an angel stirred the water; and could it really be that this supernatural power only applied to the very first person who managed to enter the pool?

This is an admittedly strange sort of scene but not one that cannot be easily explained. I like the explanation that Albert Barnes gives in his commentary. Listen to what he writes:

Regarding the angel, Barnes notes: "It is not affirmed that the angel did this "visibly," or that they saw him do it. They judged by the "effect," and when they saw the waters agitated, they concluded that they had healing properties, and descended to them. The Jews were in the habit of attributing all favors to the ministry of the angels of God."

Regarding the statement about the first one stepping into the water being healed, Barnes remarks: "This does not mean that but one was healed, and that the first one, but that those who first descended into the pool were healed. The strong medicinal properties of the

waters soon subsided, and those who could not at first enter into the pool were obliged to wait for the return of the agitation.”

When you read such statements as the one found in Ps. 91:11 which says *he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways* it can make you wonder just how involved these unseen beings may be in all our lives. So I begin our study today with this explanation of the text and the scene that I may point out that the text with good reason appears in your New Testament and that the scene is not so unusual when you have the faith to see the many unseen things that are presented to us in our Bibles. The thing I want you to see now from the passage, however, is the strong emphasis that is placed on being made whole. Look at the number of times you find that word *whole* in the verses we’ve read:

*5:4 For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.*

*5:6 When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?*

*5:9 And immediately the man was made whole , and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.*

*5:11 He answered them, He that made me whole , the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk.*

*5:14 Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*

*5:15 The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole.*

We know, of course, that the emphasis in the passage has to do with this impotent man’s physical condition. What terrible shape he’d been in. His impotence made him weak. He was evidently crippled. We don’t know how he became crippled but we do know that he was crippled for a very long time – 38 years according to v. 5. And the nature of his crippling disease was such that he was never able to avail himself of the healing quality of the pool of Bethesda. He needed help to get into the water and that help was never available. It would seem though, wouldn’t it, that even though he never had help, he always had hope for the text seems to indicate that he’d been at this pool for a very long time.

Now while the narrative places a strong emphasis on the man’s physical condition and while it’s definitely true that Jesus healed this man from his physical condition and made the man whole in such a way that the man was enabled to pick up his bed and walk – the thing I’m wondering just now is this – Do you think that when Jesus asked the man in v. 6 if he wanted to be made whole, that Jesus Himself was only thinking of the man’s physical condition?

I doubt if that was the case. And the reason I doubt that to be the case could be traced to another occasion when Christ healed a person that was bed ridden by the palsy. You may recall from Mt. 9 or Mk. 2 or Lk. 5 the case when a sick man's friends brought him on his bed to Jesus, but because of the crowd that they couldn't get through to Jesus without some thinking outside the box, so to speak. So they hoist their friend on his bed to the roof of the house where Jesus was, and then unthatching the roof they lowered their friend right in front of Jesus and you remember the first thing Jesus said to the bed ridden invalid? He said to him – *Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee*. And then to prove that He had the authority to forgive sins he ordered that man, just like the man in our text, to pick up his bed and walk.

There was a man that was made whole, not only physically but spiritually. And I believe that it is with this kind of wholeness in mind primarily, that this miracle in John 5 has been recorded and preserved for us. We know from some passages in the Bible, most notably Isaiah 1 that sin is pictured as a terrible disease.

So we read in Isa. 1:4ff *Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. 5 Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. 6 From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.*

What a description of man in his sin. What a vivid portrayal of man's total depravity. Christ Himself gives the same diagnosis of man in Mt 15:19 *For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies*. The thing I want you to recognize this morning is that Christ addresses such people in such a case spiritually when He asks them: *Wilt thou be made whole?* I wonder this morning – has Christ ever asked you that question? And if He has, has He followed up by making you whole spiritually?

So that's the question I want to draw your attention to this morning. And based on this question and what followed this question, I want you to think with me this morning on:

## The Blessing of Being Made Whole

Let's think first of all on:

### I. What it Means for a Man to be Made Whole

You could say that *wholeness* in this verse makes reference to the man being complete. That's why we read from Col. 2 this morning. Listen again to these words beginning with v. 8: *Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. 9 For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. 10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all*

*principality and power: 11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.*

Here is *wholeness* indeed, being complete *in Christ*. And certainly the phrase *in Christ* which is a common phrase especially in Paul's epistles – the phrase makes reference to the glorious truth that you are united to Christ. You are joined to Him in such a way that God sees you in Him. You're joined to Him in such a way that His life counts for yours and His death counts for yours and so does His resurrection and ascension into heaven. Your life is even now hidden in Him.

We read from Col. 2 this morning, but back in Col. 1 we're given a very clear explanation of what our union to Christ entails. These are words that ought to fill and thrill your soul. Listen to Col. 1:19-22: *For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell; 20 And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. 21 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled 22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight:*

Can this really be? Could anything be more gracious and glorious than to be presented holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight? This is what gives the believer confidence for that judgment day. In some respects that day will be a fearful day. That day is a day to dread. When the world gains an increased sense of the reality of that day approaching, they desire a hiding place. So we read in Rev. 6:15ff *And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; 16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.*

How is it that such a day can be anticipated with joy by Christians? The reason is simply this – you've been made whole. There's a text in the Psalms that use to puzzle me. It's found in Ps. 42:2. It speaks of the longing of the Psalmist's heart. Listen to it: *My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?* How is it that the Psalmist could be so anxious to appear before God? Doesn't the Psalmist know what a fearful day that will be when men must give account to their maker? Does the Psalmist think he's good in and of himself that he'll be able to withstand the scrutiny of that day?

Or could it be that the Psalmist had some idea of his union to his Savior? However much the Psalmist knew or didn't know, we certainly know that we can have confidence against that day because of our union to Christ. How else could you possibly be presented to God as holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight? You must be seen in Christ. You must be seen as one whose sins have been washed away as far as the East is from the West. You must be seen as one who is dressed in a righteousness not your own. You must be seen, in other words, in Christ.

Now up to this point I've been viewing *wholeness* from a positional perspective. I've been describing your position in Christ. You are made whole in Him. But this is not the only perspective from which your wholeness can be viewed. There's also a practical perspective that pertains to your wholeness. And that practical perspective is found in our text when Christ finds the impotent man in the temple. Look with me at v. 14 *Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*

What a picture of the connection between your wholeness and the way you live. Do you see it? Christ first says to the man *Behold, thou art made whole*. You might liken the statement to justification. Certainly in your justification you're made whole. What then should follow? Just this – *sin no more*. Christ does not suggest to the man that he cease from sin in order to be made whole. No, rather he says to the man *sin no more because thou art made whole*. And doesn't this verse serve to further illustrate the point I made earlier that when Christ spoke to this impotent man of being made whole, He wasn't just making reference to physical wholeness.

So it follows with every true believer, and don't you know this in your experience? You no longer want to sin. The sin that you use to love, now you hate. You're not so deceived as to think that you no longer have any sin. We make God a liar by such a suggestion according to John in his first epistle. But your outlook is different and your affections are different. And your striving has been changed so that you strive from the gracious and glorious truth of your wholeness in Christ. So to those Christians this morning that find themselves struggling with some particular sin, hear Christ's word spoken right to you – *Behold, you're made whole – sin no more*. And to those that think that grace is cheap or that grace opens the door to sin with impunity, you should know that that's the kind of thinking that brings forth the word of Christ *lest a worse thing comes unto thee*.

So that's what it means to be made whole. Christ speaks to us not with reference to our physical condition but to your spiritual condition. The healing of this impotent man illustrates for us something that is way better than good physical health. Being whole means being complete in Christ. I hope you can say this morning that you have been made whole by faith in Christ, and that being made whole you strive with all that's in you to live up to what you are in Christ.

The next thing I'd like you to see from the narrative this morning is:

## II. The Things that Keep a Man from Being Made Whole

The obvious thing in the narrative that kept this impotent man from being made whole was his limited perspective on what being whole really meant. In the context of Christ's mission of going to Calvary's cross, I think you and I know more about what Christ meant than this impotent man knew when Christ asked him – *Wilt thou be made whole?*

The impotent man couldn't see beyond his physical condition. We know this by the answer he gave to Christ's question about being made whole. Look at v. 7 *The impotent*

*man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.*

He could only think in terms of his physical condition. He could only view *wholeness* in terms of being physically well. Now there's certainly nothing wrong with being physically well and physically fit. There's nothing wrong with taking care of our bodies so that we might be as useful as we can be in Christ's service. For some the care of the body proves to be difficult. When I hear about all the foods I'm suppose to eat and all the other foods I'm suppose to avoid my thought very often is – *who can afford that?*

And when I hear of the efforts that some people are able to put into working out and exercising, often times my thought is – *who has time for that?* And then when you become aware that for many folks, mostly unsaved folks, but some Christians too find themselves guilty of this sort of thing which is the sin of pursuing vain glory so that physical wellness and physical fitness just contribute to pride then I respond by thinking – *who needs it?*

Wholeness goes way beyond your physical condition. In fact you can be whole without being in good physical condition. I've had people tell me, perhaps you've had people tell you this also, or perhaps you've experienced this yourself – you were healed of some disease. I've heard incredible stories of people who were afflicted with cancer and were quite beyond what modern medicine could do for people, and then one day, inexplicably the cancer just disappears. And the disappearance is so amazing that even the secular doctors and nurses are compelled to say – *it must have been a miracle.*

Some people, I'm convinced, are healed of diseases that only existed in their imaginations but whenever I hear such accounts I never question the authenticity of what I'm being told. But what I do try to strongly caution against is the notion that even if you are the beneficiary of such a miracle you shouldn't assume on the basis of that miracle that all is well between you and God. The issue, you see, on judgment day isn't going to be your physical condition during your time in this world, the issue is going to be sin.

And unless you can see beyond this present evil world and recognize that you possess an immortal soul that is going to spend eternity either in heaven or hell – until you see beyond the limitations of this present temporal world, you'll never be made whole. So that's the first thing that keeps men from being whole – they have a limited view as to what it means. They never get beyond the here and now. They can only view things in terms of this world. They're oblivious to the truth that this world is passing away. Listen to what Peter writes in his second epistle – 2Pet. 3:10 *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.* Oh may our hold on the things of this world be loosened in the light of what this world is destined for. May God help you to see beyond this world and may we all be delivered from any and every pursuit of vain glory.

But there's another thing that can keep a person back from wholeness. And what I have in mind just now pertains to that practical perspective of wholeness that I described in my

first point. Notice again the words of v. 7, paying attention now to the second part of the verse when we read the impotent man's words to Christ *Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.*

Now I expressed my view in my introduction that these words don't have to mean the very first person only became the beneficiary of this miracle. It could mean that the nature of the agitated waters was such that the benefit was temporary and so you had to be among the first to get into the water in order to gain the benefit. Whether my interpretation is right or whether the verse is saying you had to be the very first person into the water – in either case the picture that's given to us is a picture of having to compete with others in order to get into the pool. This was the problem for this impotent man – he couldn't compete. The nature of his infirmity made it impossible for him to beat anyone into this pool.

And it's on this point especially that Christians at times come away with wrong ideas about their wholeness. They think they have to compete with others in order to gain their wholeness. And where this kind of thinking really gets out of hand is when it leads to pulling others down in order to exalt yourself over them. This was the problem in Galatia where the Galatian Christians had lost track of what really made them whole and were being led to believe that they had to contribute somehow to maintaining their wholeness. Isn't it interesting that it's in that epistle that Paul has to admonish them in 5:15 *But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.*

What kind of picture is that? It's the picture of Christians trying to assert themselves by pulling others down. Even the Apostles of Christ were vulnerable to such a thing when they would argue with each other about who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. This kind of biting and devouring or competing with others to get into the pool first can only come about when Christians forget their wholeness and the meaning and basis for their wholeness in Christ.

So these are the things that keep sinners from gaining wholeness and keep Christians from enjoying their wholeness. Simply put these things amount to worldliness and carnality. May the Lord deliver us from both. So we've seen what it means to be made whole. We've seen what can keep a man from being whole. It remains for us to consider:

### III. What it Takes for a Man to be Made Whole

And the first thing I'd draw your attention to here is that it takes a sovereign act of God's grace. There are times in the gospels when you read of Christ healing multitudes. The gospel of Mark comes to mind especially the first chapter when you read of all the city being gathered together at the door where Christ was staying. And you read of how many were brought to Him during the early days of His earthly ministry.

In the case before us, however, in Jn. 5 we only read of a certain man - *a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.* This man was one among many. We know that to be the case when we read in v. 3 of *a multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, and withered.* How is it, then, that Christ only addresses this certain man who had an

infirmity for 38 years? And the simple answer is that it was Christ's prerogative to go to that man. Now it might be worth noting here that this gospel account doesn't give any indication that anyone else there was even interested in Christ. It would be a mistake to think that Christ would have turned down anyone who cried to Him for help but there's no record of anyone so crying and indeed this impotent man himself didn't cry out. We know in the narrative that he didn't even know until later that it was Jesus that had healed him.

So the whole matter of being made whole is clearly revealed in this narrative to be a matter of Christ's sovereign prerogative. Now I know that for some Christians this sort of phenomenon makes them uneasy. They reason to themselves that if this matter of salvation is a matter of God's sovereign prerogative then how do I know whether or not I'm saved? Can I know such a thing?

And the answer is that you indeed can for you see the text reveals to us not only that the healing of this man was a matter of sovereign prerogative but it was also accomplished by a powerful word from Christ. Verse 8 *Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.* And the power of that word becomes evident in the very next verse where we read *And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.*

This is how wholeness comes – by the word of Christ. This is how you're able to discern whether or not you've been made whole. Have you heard such a word from Christ? The evidence for having heard such a word is that you too will arise and walk, but rather than taking up your bed and heading home, your desire will be to take up Christ's cause and follow after Him. There's another miracle recorded for us in Matthew's gospel that makes this very plain. Mt 20:34 *So Jesus had compassion [on them], and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.*

There's the mark, then, of a man who's been made whole. He hears the gospel call and he hears it in his heart. In other words he hears it in such a way that he responds to it by following Christ. So tell me this morning as we bring this study to a close – have you been made whole? Will you be made whole? I hope you know what that means and I hope you see the things that keep you from it. May the Lord Himself bring His word home to your hearts with power so that you are made whole and as a result you arise and follow Christ.