

Deliverance in the Presence

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Amen. You may be seated.

We've just declared for endless days we will sing your praise. May today be a day we sing his praise as well.

Let's pray together.

Lord, as we prepare to be challenged, Lord, as we prepare to be convicted, Lord, as we prepare to read what you call the ancient words, God, I pray that it wouldn't be just something inspired and written way back when, but it would be that that is so relevant to our lives today that when we exit this place, when we leave this room, we can honestly say that we're not the same as when we entered. For our personal lives, for our marriages, for our families, for our jobs, for our communities, Lord, we pray that these words would not fall on deaf ears but they would speak to our hearts and our hearts because of that, would walk out in a few moments saying, "We're going to sing your praise for endless days." It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the Gospel of John 5. As you're turning to John 5, today you and I are gathered on a very special day of the calendar. This is the day where we recognize, this is the day we celebrate, this is the day that we remember in some cases, those that have been so giving, those that have been so generous, those that have been so loving in our lives. This is a day that we celebrate the moms and the mothers of our lives. This is a day that we celebrate those of you who are moms and are mothers and the incredible energy and time and fortitude that you're putting forth into shaping and molding and guiding the next generation. Today we celebrate, today we remember and there are all kinds of words that we could use to describe moms and by the way, when I speak of the word "mom," sometimes that's a biological relationship but oftentimes it's a non-biological relationship. It's an emotional relationship. It is one who mothers though may not have the same blood type and/or running through their veins. You see, oftentimes we find people who may not have had physical children but they've mothered dozens, and sometimes there may be strains and stresses there but we recognize there are those who have been a part of our lives, that have shaped us and molded us and some of the words that come to mind today are words like unconditional love, sometimes the words that come are generosity and self-sacrifice, and I don't know if it's the fact that I grew up without sisters, if it's the fact that I have all

boys in my home, but it's on days like today that when I begin to think of who and what moms are in our lives, the word that comes to mind is mercy.

You say, "Why is it mercy that comes to mind?" Because the word mercy means not getting what you deserve, and in the home that I grew up in, the fact that I am living and breathing in front of you today is proof that my mom was merciful in my life. The fact that all three of my children showed up to this campus today and they're breathing is evidence of mercy in my wife's life. And some of you may have grown up hearing this statement in your home and many of you may have passed it on to the next generation. If you're familiar with it, kind of give a response to me today. Have you ever heard this in your home? "I brought you into the world and I will take you out." If you can make that statement today because you've heard that statement in your life, you are the product of mercy. Your mom, your mother extended mercy to you by allowing you to live.

Today in John 5, we find ourselves with a young man, not so young anymore but young in respect to some, who has been sick and has been ill for 38 years of his life and he spends every day of his life at a place the Bible calls Bethesda, which means the house of or the place of mercy. And we're going to see in just a moment that Jesus enters into his life and we're going to see an interaction in his life and all that we can describe is exactly what that name means, that mercy is put forth in this man's life.

I'm going to begin in verse 1 of chapter 5 and it says,

1 There was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2 Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches.

Now, I'm going to take a time out here for just a moment. As you began to look not only at your Bible but maybe your neighbor's Bible or such, you will notice that many of our study Bibles and various versions, that verse 3 and 4 sometimes have brackets, sometimes there is parentheses, sometimes there is a footnote, and so I just want to give you a little time out warning here. Some of you may have to go to the bottom of the page or the side of the page. It's one of those little textual variances that we have that we're not going to spend a lot of time on today, but I just wanted you to be aware of because in a moment I'm going to read verse 3 and 4 and some of you are going to look at your spouse and go, "Where is the pastor? I've completely lost him today." But here we go, verse 3,

3 In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. 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 And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he said unto him, Will you be made whole? 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 who

steps down before me. 8 Jesus said unto him, Rise, take up your bed, and walk. 9 And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath. 10 The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for you to carry your bed. 11 He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up your bed, and walk. 12 Then they asked him, What man is that which said unto you, Take up your bed, and walk? 13 And he that healed did not tell me who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place. 14 Afterward Jesus finds him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, you are made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you. 15 The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole. 16 And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day. 17 But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work as well.

This passage of Scripture, an incredible story of a man for 38 years who has been sick who is now made whole but I want you to look at verse 14. Verse 14 is going to drive the entire message today because Jesus comes to him and says, "Yes, you have been made whole but sin no more." Very reminiscent of the young lady whom Jesus encounters in chapter 8, the woman caught in adultery, and when her accusers are not found he says, "Go and sin no more." Jesus recognized something in this man's life that we need to recognize in our lives as well today, that we should always seek holiness over happiness. Jesus said, "It's great that you're healed, it is wonderful." I mean, this man could not move, could not walk, could not run for 38 years and Jesus didn't say, "Oh, get that smile off your face. You're supposed to be solemn and serious." He didn't say that. He didn't tell him to quit grinning. He didn't tell him to quit skipping. He just said, "In all of your gratitude, in all of your excitement, be sure that holiness always supersedes happiness."

Today we live in a culture and a world where we promote happiness with a reckless abandonment and treat holiness as one of those things, "Well, if there's nothing better to do with your time or life, sure, why not?" But Jesus said to him, "Be sure even though you're whole, that sin no longer has a place in your life." So we have a choice today, is the driving force of our life happiness or holiness?

Now to unpack all that, three very simple questions I want to ask: the what, the who and the how. What happened at the pool of Bethesda that day. What took place so that we get the picture of what happened in this man's life?

First we've got to begin with the multitude. Notice it says there in verse 3 that they brought the sick there, they brought the lame there. This was a place that, and I've been there physically, I've seen it, I've been to the Holy Land or what we know as Israel. I've walked there and by the way, if you ever take one of those tours, quite often you'll get to a place and they say, "Well, we think this is the place or we hope that this is the place or, kind of tradition says this is the place," but when you get to the pool of Bethesda, they say, "This is the place." There is no question. There is no doubt.

Right outside one of the gates to the Temple Mount there are five or six what appear to be backyard swimming pools in our culture, places where people could sit and walk between the two and it would have been a place, as described in verse 3, where the sick were there on a very regular basis. Now, we'll deal with the miracle in just a moment but think that happens in our world too. There are places that you can go and search out and you can actually drive or fly to today, places like hot springs, mineral springs, Greenwell Springs. Those are places throughout time that people have sought out physical healing from the waters below.

Here you had a large group of people that gathered on a regular basis, in fact, this man had been sitting there for 38 years. But it's even more extensive than that. Look at verse 1. It was at the time of the feast, that's Passover, the time where everybody who was of a Jewish background and faith who had the financial resources to do so, would find themselves in Jerusalem. It wasn't just crowded, I mean, it was like Black Friday shopping kind of crowded here on this day. I mean, you can't find a parking space, you can't get anywhere. Everybody is rubbing shoulders. It is packed out.

Why is that significant? Because here is a man who every day says, "I can't get there. I'm always, someone else is always ahead of me." Do you think this was the day that he really thought was going to be his day? I mean, seriously? In fact, I bet there were days he woke up hoping that people would just stay away from the pool that day. He had a better statistical opportunity. But this day, the day that looked like it would not happen was the day that Jesus would enter into his life.

So there is a multitude and then there is this man. For 38 years. Now, I want you to think about it. The Bible is very specific here. Later on in Mark 5 there is a woman who has an illness of blood for 12 years. You have dads who say, "Well, my son throws himself often into the fire." The Bible gives us chronology for a reason. Thirty-eight years. I want you to notice what he says, not just the fact that he is sick, he says, "I have no one to help me." Think about that. Verse 7 says, "I have nobody." You know, it's bad enough to be sick for almost four decades, it's worse to be sick all alone. There is no mention of family. There is no mention of friends. He says, "There's nobody to help me."

Now, we do not know what this man was sick with. We don't have a clue. There is nobody who says, "Oh, this is what he had." We don't know but I want you to notice verse 14 again. Look at it. Jesus says, "Go sin no more." It's possible, in fact, could it be that the reason he had an illness or a sickness was because of the decisions he had made? The choices that had been a part of his life? The things that he had allowed himself to be involved in? You see, oftentimes it's when those decisions are made or those actions take place that not only affect us physically but also affect us relationally.

There was no one found to assist. No one willing to help. Then there's the miracle. He says it very clear there in verse 7, that every day when this angel shows up, people step into the water. Now there are various reasons and ways that people look at this passage. From a purely humanistic perspective, there are those who say, "Well, there was a

member of the Jewish Sanhedrin that when he would go down and step into the water, people were healed." On the other side of the equation, there are those that say, "Well, it's just like the Bible says. There was an actual angel." Now, before you dismiss that and think that's somewhat mythological or superstitious, allow me to remind you that it was an angel who came to Abram and Sarai and said, "Name your child Isaac." It was those angels who went into Sodom and Gomorrah and we know the rest of the story there. There is an actual angel in the book of Isaiah who wields a sword. It is Jacob who wrestles with the angel of the Lord and leaves with a limp in his step. We see angels moving and interacting with humanity all throughout Scripture so why not here as well?

We may not know exactly what was taking place but here's what we do know about the miracle: this man had been there for 38 years watching this take place. Do you know what that made him? An expert witness. Here's an expert witness. You would think he would say, "Well, Jesus, usually the first guy in gets healed, or you know, every third Wednesday." But, no, what does he say? "The first person in is healed." For 38 years.

So that's what's happening. A large group of people, a man who's not only been isolated because of his physical concerns but isolated from emotional connections as well, and yet he's seen it happen every day but never in his life. So here's the who: the who begins when Jesus entertains a conversation with this man. And have you ever wondered and we're going to expound more on this in just a moment, of all the hundreds maybe thousands of people that could have been there, he speaks to this one man?

Now, as you begin to study the person of Jesus in the Gospel, here's what you'll notice: any situation he was in, he did not have to question what people were thinking, what they were wondering or what was happening. The men that delivered their friend through the thatched roof in Mark 2. Jesus perceived the thoughts of his critics and his enemies. Oftentimes you hear whether he's entertained in Zaccheus' house and they come up and question why he's doing it, he says he knew what they were perceiving in their heart.

I want you to hang onto that for just a moment because when Jesus comes to Bethesda, he does not make a sideshow of things. There is not a large gathering. In fact, you begin to look at Jesus healing people in the Gospels and oftentimes the multitudes would bring huge crowds to him. Here his name is not even mentioned. There is no sun. All we know is he singles out this man.

Why this man? Why would Jesus single out this man? Well, we know that he had been there for a long time. In fact, Jesus said so. You know, if we were just going to do a chronology of Jesus' life, Jesus was about 30-31 years of age. We know that at least from age 12, he has been going to the temple during Passover every year of his life. There is the distinct possibility Jesus would have watched this man suffer for all of those years.

But you know, it's also possible it goes a little deeper than that. The Bible mentions 38 years. Now, can we just be honest with ourselves? Doesn't that seem a little random? I mean, why 38 years? But did you know that's the exact amount of time that the Israelites wandered in the wilderness? I know some of you Bible scholars and lifelong Sunday

school attenders are going, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Time out, pastor. The Israelites wandered for 40 years." Well, it was 40 years from the time in which they escaped Pharaoh's bondage until the time which Joshua actually took them into the Promised Land, but if you take off the front end when they rebelled and they griped and they whined and they moaned, and you take off the back end where they began to prepare themselves to go across the Jordan River, the time frame that they actually kept taking a lap, so to speak, was 38 years.

Here is a man who is physically ill, relationally void, and thousands of people have gathered who are descendants of and heirs of those who wandered in the wilderness and it's almost as if Jesus is giving us a picture, not just for this man's life but for all of our lives. Why did they wander? Disbelief. Why did they have to keep taking a lap? Because of fear. And what allowed that generation to go into the Promised Land? They finally believed God and did what he told them to do exactly as this man is going to do.

So we know that Jesus picks him out of the multitude. We know that his age is very significant. But let's look at the miracle that Jesus performs. Notice what Jesus does not say. Jesus does not say, "I'll carry you into the water." Jesus does not say, "Jump into the water." He says in verse 8, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." When Jesus performs this miracle in his life, he does not go according to what this man has seen for 38 years, all he simply does is speak it and this man believes it.

Now, I want to translate that to you and our lives today. On that day and at that time where we realized that we were without hope, you see, every one of us who has come to know Jesus, we're in the place of this man. We were without hope and we realized that there was nothing we could do to receive mercy of God. There was nothing that anybody else could do on our behalf and what did we do? We heard Jesus call our name. We heard Jesus come to us. The Bible makes it very clear, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." In our lives today, the forgiveness of our sins, the salvation of our souls, the restoration of our lives, doesn't come because we jump into a pool or we're the first one there or somebody carries us or does on behalf of us, how does it happen? When the Lord speaks into our life and we simply receive it and believe it.

Notice what this young man does. It says then immediately the man was made whole, this is verse 9, and he took up his bed and he walked. For 38 years he thought that his life would be complete if he could just get in the water before anybody else, but on this day because he met and because he heard and because he believed the words of Jesus, his life was forever changed which leads us to the most important question of the day: how does this happen? How does this happen in our life? I think we've got to go back to verse 14 because when Jesus comes to him and he says, "Go and sin no more," you have to look at all the other times of which Jesus healed and the times in which he interacted with people in their lives. You see, again, that man that was delivered by his friends through the thatched roof. Jesus began by saying, "Your sins are forgiven." Later he said, "Get up your bed and walk." Jesus said to him, "You have been made whole. Sin no more."

How does this man's life become our life? How do we respond to Jesus in the way that he did is you and I have got to accept the challenge, you and I have got to be willing to make holiness a greater priority than happiness in our lives.

How does that happen? First we've got to look at the multitude. We've got to look at the world around us, all 7+ billion people. Let me state the obvious this morning. It's somewhat rhetorical, that the overwhelming majority of humanity is spending every amount of their energy and every dollar that they earn to achieve happiness. They want a smile on their face. They want a skip in their step. They just want to have pleasure and lack of pain. How many people are that concerned for holiness? How many of us wake up every morning and are willing to spend our last dollar and use our last moment just so that we can say we're in a right standing with God? We were holy, righteous, sanctified different?

You see, one of the things this young man presents to us and it's a challenge to all of us today, Jesus was right in Matthew 7 when he said, "Broad is the road of destruction, but narrow is the way of righteousness." When it comes to holiness, when it comes to godliness, when it comes to living life the way the Lord has designed it to be lived, you've got to be willing – listen – you've got to be willing to be the only one at the pool, the only one at the office, the only one at school, the only one in your community. Listen, for some of you it's the only one in your family.

Holiness begins, righteousness begins in our life when we make this very important decision, it's a radical concept: we don't care what the world thinks, we only care what God thinks. Holiness happens when we choose to please God rather than to please man. Holiness occurs when we're more interested in God's opinion than God-forbid, social media's opinion. Holiness happens when it's only God that we care whose opinion matters and not the masses. You and I are berated every day of our life with thousands, if not millions, of opinions and ideas and philosophies. Everybody at the pool that day was interested in getting in the water, this man just wanted to be whole and he was willing to do it Jesus' way. He was willing to stand and look a little different in the midst of the crowd.

That's the multitude, but what about the man? What did he do? I want you to notice back in verse 7 what he says to Jesus. It says the impotent man answered him. He said, "Sir, I have no man when the water is troubled to put me into the pool, but while I'm coming there's another that steps down before me." Let me tell you what this man was incredibly gifted at: he would have done really well in our culture today, he was an expert in making excuses. Have you noticed that about our world today? Everybody's got an excuse for everything. You don't believe me, watch daytime television, nighttime television, morning television, or just scroll through social media. I'm going to tell you what I'm looking for: I am looking for that person and they are rare beyond rare, who when confronted with an issue, confronted with a problem, is actually willing to raise their hand up and say, "It's all my fault."

We blame everybody else, don't we? In fact, I had an old football coach of mine made a statement years ago. I've used it before and I'll use it again. He said, "Excuses are like armpits, we've all got them and they all stink." Now, those of you who have ever played football, you know he didn't use armpits but I cleaned it up for Sunday morning. They all stink. He was making excuses. "I don't have a person. I'm all alone. I can't walk."

But notice what happens in verse 8 and 9. Jesus says, "Rise up and walk." What does he do in verse 9? He quits making excuses. If we want holiness to take place in our life, we've got to quit making excuses. Listen, worldliness comes easy, holiness is tough. It costs us but, oh, we've become masters of excuses.

Allow me to illustrate with something that unfortunately I hear on such a regular basis. There is a time in somebody's life where two individuals, a man and a woman, they find each other's affection, they fall in love and they come to that point where they say, "We're ready to tie the knot. We're ready to get married and we want you to be a part of it." And we begin the discussion and then you find out that these two who are not married, they have not exchanged vows, have been living at the current physical address of the same for quite some time. And so you very cordially say, "Well, why is it that before you got married that the two of you are living in the same place?" Do you know what they usually say? "We can't afford to live separately. It's just not convenient at this time." Do you hear the excuses? "I can't afford it. It's not convenient. It's not possible."

This man doesn't make any excuses. He says, "You tell me to rise and walk, I'm going to rise and walk." In other words, "It doesn't matter what you've laid out, God, what you've declared for me, I'm just going to do it the way you've told me to do it." We are masters of excuses and what does the "church's excuse" look like? We justify it by, "Well, this is what the world does and this is what advisers tell me and this is what really really smart people with a lot of degrees and periods behind their name, this is what they suggest." Jesus said, "Just take up your bed and walk." No water needed. No need to get in there first. He said, "Okay, I'll do it."

It's amazing what can happen in your life when it comes to your relationship with God when you quit making excuses and we quit. So here's a guy who desired holiness in spite of the fact that he was numerically outnumbered. Here's an individual who quit making excuses. And finally, the miracle. He's healed. He's walking. He's jumping. I have a firm conviction that for the first time in 38 years, the natural laws of atrophy did not take place and he was able to run like Usain Bolt all the way across the Temple Mount. I don't know but he was whole. He was made new.

I want you to go back to verse 14 as we draw to a close. Notice what Jesus says, "Behold, you are made whole. Sin no more." Look at the first phrase. Where does Jesus find him? In the temple. Now, I want you to think about that. He didn't run around town. He didn't find his closest neighbor and friend who used to help him but doesn't help him anymore and say, "Look, it's happened!" He didn't go and find his childhood best friend and say, "Look, I've been made whole!" Where does he find him? He finds him in the temple.

You see, when we talk about holiness superseding happiness, listen to how this guy did it. He was willing to be the one among the thousands of the multitude. He was willing to quit making excuses and just trust that God knew a lot better how to live life than he does. And last but not least, listen, he was proactive. He goes to the temple. He does not just sit back and allow it to come to him. He goes forth.

Now listen, we live in a world and a society today – hear me clearly – this is not a generational statement, this is a cultural statement: we have become spoiled brats is what we've become. We think that we should have and possess and be what everybody else has. We watch television, multimillionaire athletes and think we should drive the same cars they do. No, you don't. If your annual salary is ½ of one week of their paycheck, you shouldn't drive the same car. But we think we should. We are entitled, I'm going to be honest with you, holiness does not happen because you just sit back and say, "Okay, God, let's let it happen." You will naturally gravitate, as Jesus taught us in chapter 3, to darkness.

Allow me to prove it with your life this morning. Now, you may be the outlier and this may not have happened in your life, but that means that your life is a little bit different than most of our lives. Every one of you today for whatever reason or motivation, made the decision to come to church, to hear from the word of God, to study the word of God, to sing praises to God. You made a conscious decision today that holiness superseded happiness because if it was about happiness, you would still be asleep right now. Is that correct? But you chose holiness.

Now, I know it can't just be my house, it's got to be, why is it that Sunday morning is the only day of the week I wake up late? Why is it that Sunday morning is the only day of the week where my kids get in a fight before they even get out of bed? Why is it on Sunday morning the devil shows up in full regalia in our home? That's the day of the week that things don't work. That's the day of the week the clothes don't fit. Have you ever had that one happen? Isn't that amazing? All of a sudden, I mean, that shirt fit him two days ago, you get ready for church and all of a sudden they've grown three sizes in one night. It's like it doesn't fit. We don't have any clothes. Why is it Sunday morning is the only day that at 8 and 9 o'clock in the morning you can actually get road rage walking through downtown? Because holiness, righteousness is tough and you've got to seek after it and you've got to want it and you've got to desire it because it doesn't come naturally.

Where was he? In the temple. Let me put a bow on this package before our invitation. Jesus, we don't have a whole lot that's given to us about his younger days but do you remember when he was 12 years of age, his mom and dad and all of his family began to walk down the road and about a day or so later, they realized Jesus wasn't with them. When confronted in the temple, what did he say? "Did you not know that I was to be about my Father's business?" Jesus, this man in John 5, they sought after God. They sought the things of God and what happened? God revealed himself in an incredible vivid way.

Holiness is not going to happen if you want to look like everybody else. Holiness is not going to happen if you continue to make excuses. And holiness is not going to happen, it's not going to happen if you just sit by in neutral and expect it to roll up in your life.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, maybe you're that person today that the proverbial lightbulb turned on. Maybe you realize, you know, almost every endeavor and desire of your life has been about happiness and about what pleases you and what's pleasurable to you and what can put a smile on your face. And maybe today you realize for the first time that holiness and godliness and righteousness is of such greater value. If you're that person today and you realize the desperate need that you have for Jesus in your life, the desire that you have for him to completely radically alter and transfix your life, I've got great news for you. You don't have to go sit by a pool for 38 years. You don't have to go through a series of religious hoops and endeavors. You just need to have a real serious conversation with God. You don't have to have it out loud. You don't even have to say the same words I would say, but maybe that conversation would go a little something like this. "God, you know me better than I know myself. You know everything that I've done, said and thought and today I just want you to hear from my heart that I stand guilty, guilty as charged. I've rebelled. I've messed up. I've sinned but I believe that you love me so much that Jesus came on my behalf, lived a sinless life on my behalf, died a cruel death and rose from the grave so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. And today I'm coming to you as transparently as I can and saying I'm the problem. Jesus is the answer. Forgive me. Save me. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, if that's the conversation you had with God or maybe you had another conversation, we'd love the opportunity to have a conversation with you just to hear what God has been and is doing and wants to do in your life.

Lord, as we come to this time of invitation, Lord, as we come to this time where we have the opportunity to do with our feet that which you've already done in our heart, Lord, as we sang earlier, we are transfixed on the fact that in our state and in our rebellion and in our lackadaisical attitude toward you, you still desire more than anything else for us to be forgiven and to live a life of holiness. So God, we thank you and I pray that we would not take that for granted today but just respond accordingly. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us. Whatever decision, we'll be here at the front.