

Rev.D.A.Macdonald - Jesus went up to Jerusalem

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 0 0] to Jerusalem. In contrast to the other Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke, John and his Gospel focuses more on the ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem. From the beginning of this chapter, chapter 5, to the end of his Gospel, the emphasis is mainly on what Jesus did at Jerusalem. And that's how the chapter begins. After this, there was a feast of the Jews. We are given no information by John as to what this feast was. John doesn't link, as he does in other places, this particular feast to the theme of the chapter. He merely tells us that there was a feast at

Jerusalem to explain the presence of Jesus in the city. And then he goes on to relate the miracle that was performed by Jesus there. Remember, John tells us towards the end of his Gospel the purpose of recording miracles. And Jesus did many other signs, also John designates miracles in his Gospel, did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written, and it's the purpose of them being written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John selects from the many miracles that Jesus performed, and he chooses seven to include them in his Gospel narrative. Until now, John has sat before his readership the wine of the new wine of his grace, the new water of his blessing. Under these verses that we read together today, we read of new life to a paralyzed, helpless individual. John gives detailed information as to where this latest miracle took place. Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep-gate pool in a room called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. And although he gives us this detailed information, his concern is not so much to tell us about the place, or even about the kind of people gathered there. His concern is to focus our attention on the Christ who moved among them. So I'd like to set before you five thoughts. In Jerusalem, Jesus meets a crowd of invalids. In

Jerusalem, Jesus asks a curious or a critical question. In Jerusalem, he gives confirmation of his great power, leading to controversy in Jerusalem. And then finally, he offers cautionary counsel. Crowd of invalids, curious question, confirmation of great power, controversy, cautionary counsel. So I tried to use a literation with a letter C to make it easy to remember the headings. And Jesus came to the sheep gate, which in Hebrew is called Bethesda, and the site that met him there was one that spoke of great and desperate need. We are told by John, in these lea multitude of invalids, blind, lame and paralysed. We don't need great powers of imagination to recognize the need that is set before us by the description of those who were there, blind, without sight, lame, incapable of much walking, paralysed. This word is perhaps not so easy to understand. When we think of someone paralysed, we think of someone incapable of movement. I'm not sure that the word that is translated paralysed is to be strictly understood in that sense, but rather in the sense of someone who has been a long-term invalid. When we think of the term invalid, we think of someone who would not expect to meet on the street, someone confined to bed, or at least housebound because of their prevailing illness, whatever it might be. This then is the site that met the Lord Jesus. A group of helpless individuals gathered there unable to help themselves. John describes them as a large number. The word he uses is a multitude gathered to this place called Bethesda. Everyone in this island is familiar with the term Bethesda because of the home and hospice located in Stornoway. Perhaps we've had occasion to go there because of members of families been there. Perhaps some of our families came to end their earthly journey in that place. Literally the house of outpouring, the house of mercy. And among this large number of helpless individuals, Jesus the Son of

God and human nature, moved around, unrecognized and unknown. John has been writing of the the pride of man as illustrated by the nighttime visitor who came to Jesus, Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews in chapter 3, member of the influential St. Hydrum, but also a teacher in Israel.

And Christ in his conversation with Nicodemus highlights how Nicodemus himself requires to be taught. So do you and I. John also writes of thirst in the life of man using the woman of Samaria as an illustration. We too are thirsty, but often we don't know what we are thirsting for. Seeking to satiate our thirst here and there by the temporary affairs of life. And so in this chapter John is writing about the life of man broken and helpless just like the large crowd gathered to the pool beside the sheep gate. And in my view they are representative of broken humanity in a fallen sinful world. So helpless, so incapable of healing themselves. And if you ask the question why is the whole of humanity broken, helpless, powerless, the response that you find in the Bible is that it is because of the effect of the power of sin in the life of man. It all flows from the effect of original sin in the life of our first parents Adam and Eve. Now that's not merely an event that took place, it is a condition that belongs to every person. Shorter catechism for those who are familiar with it asks the question did our first parents that they continue in the estate where in the were created. And the response that you find is this our first parents being left to the freedom of their own will fell from the estate where in the were created by sinning against God. And then you find later on in the catechism wherein consists the sinfulness of that is stated to which man fell. And the response the sinfulness of that is stated to which man fell consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, the corruption of his whole nature which is commonly called original sin. Together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it. And the effect of original sin is that the natural man, that is in a state of unbelief, we do not accept the things of the Spirit of God. Apostle Paul writes the natural person right into the

[9 : 48] Corinthians does not accept the things of the Spirit of God for they are folly to him. He is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. And what Paul is saying before us there has been true about powers of reason is also true of our will. He writes to the Romans the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God for it does not submit to God's law indeed it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. So let us pay careful attention to what the Bible teaches. It states that the natural man that is in a state of unbelief does not accept, not is able to understand the things of the Spirit of God.

More importantly the natural person cannot accept that's how we come into the world. We are spiritual invalids if you like. What effect does it have on us?

We are totally depraved. There is no area of our life that is not corrupted by the power of sin. And you remember how the prophet Isaiah how he described the corrupt nature of man in the first chapter from the soul of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in it. So that the whole of man is corrupted by the power of sin. Our minds are darkened or understand in our hearts which are described as being deceitful above all things and desperately wicked or sick.

So if original sin the reason for our spiritual state we have set before us here in this picture that John depicts for us of total depravity in the lives of these people who were blind, lame and paralyzed. That is what is true on a spiritual level. It was true here at a natural level but it is true on the spiritual level. They are a multitude of unnamed persons. If you ask me who, what or what were they like? My response would be this that my face is on this person and your face is on that person gathered there. That they are all like us. That they are depicting us, representative of us. Someone once described this gathering at Bethesda and words like this, inblids out of options. Can't walk can't work, can't care for themselves, can't even roll down the bank of the pool into the water. And you may be saying what does this person and a person like me have in common? For a start the Bible says that anyone who is not holy will never see the Lord. It's a prerequisite for heaven, holiness.

Perfection is a requirement to enter heaven. And you know we persuade ourselves that we are good. We have never done anything too bad. You remember, can illustrated like the Joseph's brothers in the Old Testament and the Genesis narrative. And you remember how indignantly they protested, we are honest men, honest men. How quickly they forgot, how they dealt with their brother whom they almost killed and sold to the traders as a slave. Diptus caught of colors in the blood of a slaughtered goat and made deceive their elderly father, making him believe that Joseph was killed by a wild animal. Honest men. You know we believe that our goodness will surely qualify us for heaven. And that kind of reasoning may sound okay to us, but it's not okay to God. What we often forget is the one who sets the standard and the standard is high. Let me just give an example of the close of Matthew 5. You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. So often we compare ourselves to other people. That's the kind of standard that we have when we're young, perhaps even not so young.

[14 : 43] We have our idols, we have our role models. Those whom we openly or secretly admire, they become our standard. And you find that people dress like their role model. I haven't seen anybody dress in the way I dress, so I guess I can't be a role model. But you find people dress like their role model, they even cut their hair like their role model. They even color their hair like their role model. You know we tend to ape hot we have as an idol or a role model. But you know the lives of other people are not our standard because their lives are just as screwed up as our lives are too. The standard is to be like Christ. Anything less is inadequate. And today if we are not in Christ we are like the invalid, paralyzed. Like the invalid we are trapped. Like the invalid we are stuck in a groove. We have no answer to our situation. Like the invalid we are left hopeless. And the only hope that we can have is that Jesus intervene in our lives and do what he did for this man. The people here were waiting and watching.

They were waiting for the stirring of the water. You know did you notice in the reading the Bible goes from verse 3 to verse 5. There's no verse 4 in the reading that we had. But you didn't notice that when you were reading it. Now the last time I mentioned that in this very church from another passage in the Bible it caused me huge problems. Because I got a letter from a man in America who happened to be in the audience and told me that that deterrent which version of the Bible he was always going to use he would never use the SV. He would always use the authorized version. That's not why I mentioned it. Because the reason that it is not included here in this chapter is that in the best Greek manuscripts verse 4 is not there. But if you go to some versions of the

Bible you will find verse 4 written down that these people the verse 4 has inserted an angel went down at a certain time into the pool stirred up the water then whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was made well of whatever disease he had. It's not a verse that exists in the best original Greek manuscripts but it serves to indicate to us the kind of superstitious belief that prevailed that was instrumental in bringing this large group of invalids to this place. They were waiting for the stirring of the water.

In other words they were seeking some kind of healing through a superstitious belief. And among this large gathering of invalids was this unnamed man John tells us one man was there, an invalid for 38 years. You know how ever one interprets or understands this piece of information, read the length of time regarding the length of time that he was an invalid I think it is safe to say there was no hope of recovery without a miracle taking place. Wasn't something that happened recently? It had occurred 40 years before. Now I cannot say whether this man was the most severely affected or the most severely disabled in this large number but you know I cannot help wondering if he was the most severely disabled. There is nothing to indicate why Jesus approached this man more than any other except that we see the sovereignty of Christ being exercised in approaching this man. But in my own mind I cannot help but wonder if this man was the most severely disabled and the reason I say that is this would his healing give hope to others who were less perhaps disabled than he. Would other say see what happened to this man? Is it possible that the same person with the same power can heal me? Would it constrain others to call upon the name of the Lord? You know how at times when conversion takes place in the life of someone who may have been noted for their blatant disregard of the message of the

Bible and that person is converted. You know how it may affect the lives of others. It's just a thought. But then maybe you're saying well I'm not in that large crowd and let me say to you that's what you're saying you're in denial. Are you saying to me if you are not in Christ today that you are already healed?

[20 : 44] Because if you are not healed you are in that large group who gathered by the pulo and that brings me to my second thought a crowd of invalids a real sense in which we all belong among them. Secondly a curious question John gives us this snippet of information when Jesus saw him lying there knew that he had already been there a long time. Jesus knew that this man was already there a long time was before as any conversation and that tells you that this is not just an ordinary man that he is someone who is in possession of knowledge that can only be known to God. He sees you here today as well. He knows all about you. He sees you if you are struggling with your sin with your disability. He sees you without hope and without light and without faith. He knows the length of time that this man had spent there. He knows the years that have been in your life too.

He knows the number of times that you like this man have spent by the water side languishing helplessly. He knows the number of years you have spent to in and fro from this from services in this very building and today you are here again and is your condition still the same? Would that be a description of you? If it is, wouldn't you read again the conversation that took place between this man and the Savior? That invalid may not know the identity of the stranger who moved so compassionately amongst the sick but he's sure going to find out his identity and the stranger asks him a question that many may be surprised at the question that is asked of this man. You know he didn't ask him, you know, when you go to visit a sick person, this is some of the things you may say, can I can I can I get anything for you? Can I can I bring you a glass of water or or something to drink? Can I make you more comfortable? Is there anything in particular that you might like? Do you need some additional clothing? Do you have laundry that requires attention? Would you like me to read a passage of the Bible with you? Would you like me to pray with you? But you see Jesus didn't ask any of these questions of this man. He asked him, do you want to be healed?

What kind of question is that to ask of someone unable to walk paralyzed for almost 40 years? Do you want to be healed? Could this man not say, well what do you think leaves me languishing in this place? As he could have said that but you notice he didn't say it. Many might think what a stupid question, that will be true probably of asked by by myself or yourselves, but we know with certainty that Jesus is asking the question and he never asked a stupid question. There is obviously something behind the question that may not be apparent initially. What lies behind it? Well whatever lies behind it note that the disabled man doesn't answer the question. It's not to say that he doesn't give an answer, that's very different altogether, but he doesn't answer the direct question that he is asked. And it seems to me that Jesus puts his finger on the main issue here. You see maybe this man had had grown so used to his condition that he no longer had any hope of restoration. Might even be that the thought of restoration to health might be a more frightening prospect than the life that he now lived. He might have been content to be just a beggar.

Here was a man and he was in the place where healing took place. Not only that he was in the presence of the one who had the very power to heal. You know what is possible to be in the place where blessing is obtained in a church service.

But let me ask you the pointed question, do you want to be healed? In other words, do you want to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ in your life? Do you want to trust in him alone for salvation? This question is of the utmost importance. It's the question that the gospel of Jesus Christ asks of you and me today and every time that we hear the gospel do you want to be healed? It's a question that comes right to the heart of our life. It's not asking you are you enjoying the preaching.

[26 : 23] It's not asking you how much do you understand. He's not even asking you do you enjoy listening to the preaching of the word but just this do you want to be healed? He's not asking you who was in church or who wasn't. He wants you to focus your mind and your heart on Christ alone. On this very important question because your eternity hangs on this, do you want to be healed? Because today you are in the place where God delights to heal. But is this your consuming desire?

And you know this man tries to evade the question. You know we're good at evading direct questions aren't we? Sometimes when we're put in a corner we try to get round the question. We don't want to answer the direct question and you and that might have been your practice. Might be your practice right up to this very moment. Are you saying ask me some other time minister but not today? You don't understand the cost that is involved to me if I answer in the affirmative?

Well I don't know anything about that but I do know the tremendous cost of not answering in the affirmative. And the tremendous cost of not answering in the affirmative is this, the loss of your eternal soul. No one but no one can afford that. So the question goes right to the heart of your situation today. It's a penetrating insensitive knowledgeable question. Do you want to be healed? I remember once preaching on this before and there was a retired minister present in the audience. And when I was shaking hands of the door and I asked him how he was, his response was I want to be healed. Is that your response today? I want to be healed. Curious question, a critical question you might say, a crowd of invalids, confirmation of great power. Notice Jesus doesn't rebuke the man for waiting for something unusual to happen, at least not directly, although I think you could make an argument that it is implied in the question that he's asked.

He could easily have rebuked him for looking to a temporal occurrence, looking to a disturbance of the pool of water rather than crying out to God. And is that not so like us waiting for something unusual to happen? If I could have a Damascus road conversion experience instead of obey the revealed word of God.

And it's as if Christ overlooks the ignorance of this man. And that in itself I think is wonderful because we are all ignorant. The Psalmist states with the light of the knowledge that is granted to him, I was brutish and ignorant. I was like a beast toward you. But here is one who is in possession of power. What is true? He gives power to the faint and to him who has no mighty increases strength.

[30 : 02] This is none other than God in our nature. One to whom has been given the tongue of those who are taught that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. This is Jesus who is revealed in the word of God. It's not superstitious belief that we require, not some new program or the appearance of godliness.

But the power of God and Christ to transform our lives. And you notice it is Christ who approaches the man, not the man Christ. That's a scriptural order however we may interpret our own personal experiences. No one stretched out a hand of welcome to Christ. No one got up to meet him. The ones who could get up were blind and they couldn't see him. The ones who could see were either lame or paralysed but they didn't recognize him. What a true picture of broken humanity.

When he asks the question do you want to be healed? He has the power to heal. That's how Jesus treats those the lost and the lame. It's a kind of mercy that this broken, confused humanity requires. And he proves that he possesses this great power. Note what he says. Get up, take up your bed and walk. Get up, walk.

The very things that had eluded this man for 38 years. Get up and walk. Almost like saying to this man, fly to the moon and almost physical impossibility. The very things that he couldn't do for all of these years. And that's symbolic of what Christ does in the spiritual realm. He comes to the spiritually dead and he quickens to life. He empowers the spiritually dead to respond. And further down in the chapter you read these words as the father raises the dead and gives them life. So also the son gives life to whom he will. The word raises the dead. It's the same word that is used here in the original in the command. Get up. And it makes the point that it is by the the power of God that reads, raises Jesus from the dead. That Jesus himself raises up from sin, despair and defeat. Because the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.

Get up and walk. And Jesus is the same power if we will but hear and obey his voice and the word of God. Confirmation of great power. A curious question, crowd of invalids leading to controversy. John records this little detail for us regarding the day on which this man was healed. John says, now that day was the Sabbath.

[33 : 22] Why is John recording this? When this man was walking home, as we assume he was, there would be very few I think in Jerusalem who would not recognize him. He had been so long by the Pool of Bethesda. His face would be a familiar face to the population. And John states how he was intercepted by the religious police. We are so pleased to see you they say to him. We are so pleased to see that you have been restored to health. We rejoice with you. Was that the message? No. They are hypocritical. So the Jews said to the man who had been healed is the Sabbath.

It's not lawful for you to take up your bed. They ignored the fact that this man was restored to health. They pay attention to the fact he's carrying his mattress under his arm. Not lawful for you to take up your bed. Oh they had a high regard for the Sabbath you might say. Well on the face of it. But what they really thought was if you examine it carefully that they could earn the favor of God. In other words they were practicing a works religion. You will not find what they are claiming here written in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. And without going into the wide of Sabbath issue they were guilty of adding to the word of God. They were trying to outdo God himself. What it demonstrates is this. That a legalistic nature and approach to life is also one of the many plagues to afflict the heart of man as a consequence of the fall. Yes Sabbath observance has its rightful place. I'm not denigrating the observance of the Sabbath in the slightest. But these men were so driven by the whip of legalism that this wonderful sign of God's grace was ignored. In the book of Deuteronomy you will find you shall not add to the word that I command you nor take from it that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you in the book of Revelation. I warn everyone who bears the words who hears the words of the prophecy of this book if anyone adds to them. I will add to them the plague described in the book. What were the Jews guilty of? They were guilty of these charges of adding to the word of God. And you know we too need protection from that kind of attitude also. Doesn't detract in any way from the precious status of the Lord's day which commemorates the rising of Jesus from the dead. Controversy, confirmation of great power, the curious question, a crowd of invalids, finally cautionary counsel. John tells us afterwards, afterward Jesus found the man in the temple. We don't know if there was a great time lapse but merely that this further meeting took place. It was in the temple and that makes you wonder was he in the temple precincts to give thanks to God for his new state of health. Because the temple is where worship was offered. It's where sacrifices were made. Does do the newly converted not seek the fellowship of the Lord's people where they gathered for worship Sabbath and weekday? Was this man doing the same? I would like to think so. But I cannot be sure. I cannot be sure because the shanigal at the back of my mind. John tells us that Jesus reminds this man see you are well. You wouldn't think that he would need to have pointed out to him that he was well.

You would have thought that was obvious to himself as well as obvious to other people who met him. I have no doubt it was. Why the reminder? Are we not prone to forget the wonders done by the Lord? You know when people are ill they will make all sorts of promises if they can be but better. They may have gone through horrific experiences may have been in a car accident for example and hope of recovery not not not great. And those who are concerned with them make all sorts of promises if they can be but well. You see we often tend to forget once we get better. And even those who have experience of amazing grace it is also true that they too tend to forget. Remember what the psalmist says bless all my soul the Lord thy God and not forgetful be. Why? All his gracious benefits he has bestowed on thee. Why does the psalmist say not forgetful be if there was no danger of forgetting what God had done. And so you see the Passover where the Jews commemorated their deliverance from Egypt which is superseded by the

Lord's supper which sets before us the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and in visual aid forum we need to have these things set before us don't we. To remind us of what Christ has done for us. And you see the cautionary counsel is expressed here sin no more says Jesus to this newly healed man that nothing worse may happen to you. Why does Jesus say that? Well what I understand from it is this that what happened in the past in the life of this man had something to do with the fact that he was paralyzed 38 years. And Jesus is saying to don't do it again for something worse may happen. And that makes me ask the question does that mean that that that this man learned nothing from his years of being paralyzed. You know I have to say that life's experience however hard it may be does not of itself lead us to Christ. It doesn't make us learn of our need of a savior or appreciate what Christ has done in his death, suffering's death and resurrection. Did the counsel given to this man did it keep him from falling into that particular sin again? I don't know. Did this man place such high value on the health restored and especially on the restore of health. And I have to say again I don't know. What I do know is what a person is truly converted. Christ is infinitely precious to them. And that is demonstrated more and more in their lives. It's as if Jesus said to this man you fell once and your punishment was sore if you fall twice. Your punishment will be even sore. So there are lessons there for us too. There is always the danger that we fall back into all sins even if we think we have overcome them. I'm sure you found that out. We need to be kept at every stage of our lives until we take the final step. The most momentous step of all takes us out of life into the eternal rally. A crowd of invalids. Do you find yourself among them today? A curious question. It's very critical in its nature. How do you respond to it? Do you want to be healed? Because this man, the Lord Jesus Christ has the power to heal. He's demonstrated confirmation of the power. Yes it led to controversy.

Ignore the controversy. Focus on the Christ of God and remember the cautionary note. Let us pray. O eternal God, we thank thee this day again for thine own infallible truth. Help us to profit from our gathering in thy name and may we be enabled each and all to respond in the affirmative to the one who asks the penetrating incisive question with regard to healing and the glory shall be thine. In Jesus name we ask.