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*The Questions Of Jesus (Week 3):*

Do You Want To Get Well?

**March 15, 2009**

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**~ Scripture: John 5:1-9a ~**

### INTRODUCTION

We're continuing our series of Lenten sermons on the questions Jesus asked. There are lots of questions we have for Jesus; but it turns out that He has a few of His own to ask us.

Two weeks ago: The WHAT Question. What is the direction of your life? Based on the question Jesus asked John & Andrew (John 1), "*What do you want?*" The point of the sermon was to ask for something big to drive your life. I loved the last line. It was a prayer: "*Please don't use Your power to help us find our car keys. Help us want what You want.*"

I felt guilty after Matt preached that sermon. The next week, Marcie & I were in downtown Ann Arbor on a Friday night (the busiest time of the week). . .and a parking space opened right across the street from where we were going. What's worse, I didn't even pray for it! ☺

Last week: The HOW Question. Based on the question Jesus asked Nicodemus (John 3), "*How will you believe?*" Jesus had just told Nicodemus he had to be born again to enter the Kingdom of God. This befuddled Nicodemus. "*How can I be born again? How can I get into heaven? Do I have to be good enough?*" Do you remember the bottom line: "It's not *good* people who get to heaven, it's *forgiven* people."

Today we come to another incident in Jesus' ministry—found in John 5—in which He raises an important question for us to consider. Let's read the passage—**John 5:1-9a. . .**

<sup>1</sup>*Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews.* <sup>2</sup>*Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.* <sup>3</sup>*Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.*<sup>1</sup> <sup>5</sup>*One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.* <sup>6</sup>*When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"* <sup>7</sup>*"Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."* <sup>8</sup>*Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."* <sup>9</sup>*At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.*

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<sup>1</sup> Some less important manuscripts add "*paralyzed—and they waited for the moving of the waters.* <sup>4</sup>*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.*"

Tradition held that an angel of God would periodically stir the water in the pool. The first one to enter the water during that time would be healed of whatever the affliction.

There are dimensions of our lives which long for and need the healing touch of God.

Healing was a regular part of Jesus' ministry. Likewise with the disciples on into the early church. The apostles saw themselves continuing Jesus' mission & ministry.

After while, healing came to be viewed as "specialized" / "extraordinary". It became the exception rather than the norm—which opened the way for the "fringe few" to abuse it. We've all seen the excesses. So now we're afraid of it, and it ends up not being emphasized very much in our circles.

Yet Paul listed healing among the spiritual gifts given to God's people. Healing remains a gift given to the Christian community.

### DO YOU WANT TO GET WELL?

Now when Jesus happened onto this large group of disabled people—gathered there to beg for money and hopefully to be healed—He went to one man specifically. Jesus asked this man a strange question: "*DO YOU WANT TO GET WELL?*"

Strange question, don't you think? Should be obvious, shouldn't it?

- For 38 years he'd been in this condition—maybe since birth (we don't know). How many of you are 38 or under? How many over 38? In our years, we're talking all the way back to 1971.
- Here he is with a bunch of other obviously disabled folks.
- Here they are beside a place of healing.

So why would Jesus ask such a preposterous question?

Well, after the man in the story pulls out all his excuses, you begin to get the picture:

- "*I'm all alone*"
- "*I don't have anyone to help me*"
- "*Other people have let me down*"
- "*Other people always get ahead of me*"

When people complain persistently about a problem they have—e.g.: a relationship gone sideways, a job falling apart, or difficult circumstances—you start to wonder, "*Do they really want a resolution?*"

Sometimes people don't want to get well because it would remove their reasons for complaining. Many like to moan & groan because of a damaged self-image (i.e.: that's the real problem). . .or because they've developed a habit of focusing on the negative (i.e.: "negatrons" we called them where I worked in Detroit). They talk as though they want their circumstances to get better, but they really don't. If things got better, they wouldn't know what to do with themselves.

Getting well for this invalid might have meant: going back to work, not hanging out with his longtime buddies at the pool, giving up familiar surroundings and routines, and eventually returning to the mainstream of society. You would think he would want to get well, but deep down inside, we wonder.

EXAMPLE> You would think the same about prisoners / alcoholics:

- Prisoners often have a hard time adjusting to the “outside world”. It’s actually more secure for them in prison.
- Alcoholics (rather, families of alcoholics) often have a hard time with sobriety. It throws off the family’s sense of “balance” (warped as it is).

We don’t want to get well because getting well usually means significant changes are required. It means leaving a familiar “comfort zone” (almost anything can become a comfort zone—even pain). It means putting aside the security blanket of excuses, justifications and rationalizations:

- “I’m single.”- - -“I’m married.”
- “I’m black.”- - -“I’m whatever (minority).”
- “I’m from a dysfunctional family.” [Isn’t just about everyone?]
- “I’m a middle child.”- - -“I’m an only child.” [That was mine!]

How many times do we use our challenges to avoid responsibility for our actions, let alone the way we treat and respond to others?

We still have to ask ourselves this morning, “Do I want to get well?” Deep down (maybe on the unconscious level), we may NOT want to be healed:

- May have to confront some difficult issues (e.g.: get counseling; get a Stephen Minister).
- May have to make some tough decisions (e.g.: leave a relationship that’s abusive).
- May have to confront a situation, a conflict we’ve been avoiding or that’s getting worse.

Whatever you’re going through—whether it’s a physical or emotional situation, a divorce, a bad job dismissal, a less than desirable marriage, whatever—it would be good to let Jesus ask you that question this morning. I know it’s counterintuitive. Of course, you want things to improve, to get better. But are you willing to take the risks and challenges that “wellness” pose?

### WHEN?

And while we’re at it, here’s another related question: WHEN? It’s actually implied in Jesus’ question: *If you DO want to get well, then WHEN will you take the necessary steps.*

Some people wait year after year for a miracle to happen. . .for some big event that will make everything better. And it doesn’t come. . .and they’re nowhere.

ILLUSTRATION> Someone I know struggled with smoking for years. He quit and started back many times. Once he was talking with some friends as they were taking a “smoking break”. They were having a conversation about how they all wanted (needed) to quit. Each was going to “one of these days”. There were the old familiar excuses:

- “I have to get ready to get prepared to face life without cigarettes.”
- “One of these days I’ll start tapering down”
- “As soon as I get through (whatever), and my stress level has gone down.”

Well, my friend had the corker. He said: “I would ask God to help me, but I’m afraid He would.”

☺ That ended the conversation!

IF NOT NOW, WHEN? When will you make the change you know you need to make?

- When will you put the bottle down. . .or stop the compulsive gambling? [I know the old line, “I can quit anytime I want.” Problem is, you just never “want to quit”. And you hardly know if/when you’ve crossed over the line from abuse to dependence.]
- When will you take steps to address the anger, the depression, the negative attitude?
- When will you start looking for a job?
- When will you make the adjustments you know you need to make in spending habits?
- When will you go get the help you know you need to get (e.g.: see the doctor)?
- When will you straighten out the lie you told your spouse?
- When will you apologize to the family member who hurt you, betrayed you (years ago)?
- When will you recognize that you’ve shut down emotionally and physically toward your spouse, and need to rekindle the flame?

### WHAT MUST I DO?

If you are serious about getting through whatever you’re facing. . .serious about getting well...

If you are serious about getting your life in order...

If you really want to get out of the mess you’re in...

Here’s what you must do.....

Just as Jesus said to the paralytic invalid: ***“Get up. Pick up your mat and walk. At once the man was cured and was on his way.”***

- You’ve got to get up off the ground == Make a move. Get away from where you’ve been living (in your mind). Change something in your environment.
- You’ve got to take up your bed == Have you become comfortable with discomfort? Get out of the old comfort zone. Stop the complaints, the excuses.
- And be on your way == Some things / people around you are never gonna change, but YOU can change; you can be changed—and move on. *Your past does not need to equal your future!*

All the healing you need this morning may or may not come either today or down the line. But it will surely come in all its fullness when we meet Jesus “on the other side”. But let’s get all we can get NOW.

- SO:
- Do you want to get well?
  - Do you want to recover?
  - Do you want to be restored?
  - Do you want to be renewed?
  - Do you want to forge ahead?
  - Do you want to mend?
  - Do you want to start over?
  - Do you want to overcome?
  - Do you want to be free?
  - Do you want to be pure?
  - Do you want to bear fruit?
  - Do you want to be healed?
  - Do you want to be whole?