

# THE REAL JESUS

John 4:43-5:18

A.W. Tozer once wrote...

*There are a great many bogus Christs among us these days, and we must show them for what they are, and then point to the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. For you know there is the romantic Christ of the romance novelist and there is the sentimental Christ of the half-converted cowboy and there is the philosophical Christ of the academic egghead and there is the cozy Christ of the poet and there is the muscular Christ of the all-American half-back. But there is only one true Christ and God has said that He is His Son.*

Tozer is saying — there are many false versions of Jesus masquerading as the real Jesus. Fortunately, God gave us his written word so that we could know the real Jesus.

Look at John 20:31...

*but these [signs] are written so 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 wrote his gospel so that we would believe that Jesus is the Christ — the Savior of the World — the Son of God and that by believing, we would have life in his name. Jesus is God with us — the God who came for us to deliver us from our hopelessness and helplessness.

## REVIVES

*John 4:43 After the two days he departed for Galilee. 44 (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) 45 So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.*

Now John tells us Jesus leaves Samaria and arrives in Galilee — back on Jewish soil — where Jesus grew up. And John tells us that Jesus said — “A prophet has no honor in his own hometown.” But then in the next verse we read that the Galileans welcomed him because they had seen the signs and wonders he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover.

Now on the surface those statements seem at odds with each other. But John’s doing something deliberate here. He’s contrasting the way the Jews in Galilee superficially welcomed Jesus and the way the Samaritans faithfully received Jesus. In Samaria — the people received and believed in Jesus based on his words, not because of signs and wonders performed. Now — John is foreshadowing how the Galileans will initially welcome him — but their welcome is superficial and based on signs and wonders.

*46 So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. 47 When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.*

John introduces us to a royal official in King Herod’s army who lives in Capernaum. He’s also a desperate father whose son is on his death bed. So when the official hears that Jesus is in Cana, he makes the 16 mile trip from Capernaum to see if the rumors are true — to see if Jesus can heal his son.

*48 So Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” 49 The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” 50 Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.*

Jesus's response is direct — so direct that it's startling to us, isn't it? Now if that's all he'd said to the man — we'd be left to wonder what happened to the compassion of Jesus. But these two lines invite us into the tension of the Real Jesus. Jesus is both — direct and empathetic. He's confrontational and compassionate. The official initially comes to Jesus as a means to an end — seeking a sign and a solution to his problem.

Jesus uses the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural in his rebuke — so that it literally reads — Unless you all — unless you people see signs and wonders you will not believe.

So Jesus is extending the rebuke to this man, his fellow Galileans — and because its been preserved in Holy Scripture — its even extended to us.

Tim Keller writes,

***Love without truth is sentimentality; it supports and affirms us but keeps us in denial about our flaws. Truth without love is harshness; it gives us information but in such a way that we cannot really hear it. God's saving love in Christ, however, is marked by both radical truthfulness about who we are and yet also radical, unconditional commitment to us.***

Jesus is direct with the official because he wants him to know that there's an even greater need that his son has. There's an even greater need that he has. And the same is true for us. If we're honest — Our pursuit of Jesus is often driven by pragmatism instead of genuine love. People want God to do something *for* them before they're willing to trust and obey Him. Pragmatism focuses on immediate results and what works for us.

Does that mean we can't ask God for help? — Absolutely not.

Scripture is full of encouragement to call upon the Lord for our every need. But it does mean we should check our motives. Do we only go to God when we need something? If so — that makes him a genie in a bottle where you are his master. Relationship pursues the Lord for him and trusts him to give you what is best.

Pragmatism asks — what can religion do for me? Will it heal my grief — then maybe I'll give it a try. Will it help me loose weight — then maybe I'll give it a try? Will it help me with my bankruptcy, depression, job search? If I pursue God...will I get married, have kids, get a house, and live happily ever after?

If so...then I'm in! What can religion do for me?

Our pragmatism is fed by a culture of consumerism — We shop for goods and services that work for us. And if we think there's something better — we'll look elsewhere. But what happens when we treat God and his church like the way we treat shopping for goods and services? We want God to work for us like Amazon Prime. Access to unlimited goods at the best prices, shipped to be in 2 days of less.

David Wells in his book *No Place for Truth* writes —

***We have turned to a God that we can use rather than to a God we must obey; we have turned to a God who will fulfill our needs rather than to a God before whom we must surrender our rights to ourselves. He is a God for us, for our satisfaction...And so we transform the God of mercy into a God who is at our mercy. We imagine that he is benign, that he will acquiesce as we toy with his reality and co-opt him in the promotion of our ventures and careers.***

Are you pursuing Jesus as a means to an end? Or are you pursuing Jesus simply to get Jesus?

Jesus's response to the man is marked by radical truthfulness and compassionate love — and therefore — he avoids being sentimental and harsh. Jesus gives this man more than he asked for.

He heals his son by the power of his word — and he confronts this man’s greater need to believe in Jesus as his Savior — not merely as his problem solver.

***51 As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. 52 So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” 53 The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” And he himself believed, and all his household.***

On the way back home — the his servants meet him to let him know that his son was recovering. And he finds out that the fever left his son at the same time Jesus told him that his son would live. The man considered the life-giving power of Jesus’s word to heal his son from afar. He considered the truth-telling words of Jesus to seek genuine belief. And with his son’s physical healing — spiritual healing was brought to his house.

The official moved from pursuing Jesus for pragmatic reasons to believing in Jesus for something more.

This sign points to the reality that Jesus has power over disease and death — and when we believe in him we have access to his life-giving power. Jesus is the Son of God who brings life by the power of his word and he has come to bring life and conquer death.

And here’s what’s beautiful about this passage — Jesus revives and brings life despite our mixed motives and imperfect pursuit. Jesus heals this man’s son — not because he came with perfect faith -- but because he’s compassionate. He doesn’t wait to bring life from death until we’ve figured out how to approach God perfectly. He saves us — revives us — in our imperfection — while we’re dead in our trespasses and sin.

## **RESTORES**

***5:1 After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. 3 In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.***

Jesus is back in Jerusalem for one of the pilgrim feasts. We’re not sure which one — but the point is — it was one of the pilgrim feasts that required Jews — even Jesus — to go to Jerusalem. Now, on the northeastern corner of Jerusalem’s wall is the Sheep Gate. People could enter the city from here, and it was also the place where sheep used in Temple sacrifice would enter into the city. And near the Sheep Gate was the Pool of Bethesda — which means House of Mercy. The pool has 4 roofed colonnades that form the perimeter and one in the middle dividing it into two pools. The blind, lame, and paralyzed would lay under these roofs to get relief from the heat, beg for money, and most importantly — they came to be healed. The water of the pool was popularly believed to possess curative powers.

The belief — rooted in superstition — not Scripture — was that every so often an angel would stir the water and the first person in the water would be cured of what ailed him or her.

***5 One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?”***

Now, we’re introduced to a man who’s been disabled for 38 years. Given that the average life expectancy of a man at this time was around 40 — this man has been disabled for nearly all — if not all his life.

So he asks the mans — Do you want to be healed?

Now on the surface we might think — well that’s a stupid question! Of course he wants to be healed. Who wouldn’t want to be healed?

The whole reason he's here at the pool is to try to get in the water at the right moment and be healed.

But let's give Jesus the benefit of the doubt for a moment. Jesus doesn't speak flippantly or carelessly. Every word he ever spoke was intentional. Let's give Jesus the benefit of the doubt that he saw something in this man. And whatever he saw — led Jesus to ask his question. Perhaps this man had lost hope and in his despair had lost the desire to even get well. Maybe his physical paralysis had spread to paralyze his will. Like his atrophied muscles — his heart had atrophied. He had lost hope. Jesus's question serves to stir him — to awake in him a desire for change — to find hope again.

***7 The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me."***

The man responds to Jesus and expresses his despair and lack of hope. He tells Jesus — I have no one to wait here with me. No one to get me into the pool at the right moment. Every time the pool is stirred someone beats me to the water. In that statement — the man is saying — I've been trying to get into this water for years and it's never worked. He admits that his way hasn't worked — that he's helpless — without resources or relationships to do anything about it.

***8 Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." 9 And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.***

Jesus finds this man in his state of helplessness and hopelessness and gives him more than he asked for. He sees this man who's trusting in superstition instead of God. He sees this man in a state of despair and despondency and he restores him. Jesus speaks restoration into his body and tells him to get up, pick up his mat, and walk. Muscles that would have been atrophied and in need of physical therapy are restored and ready to stand and be used.

This sign — like the others — reveals two things...

***First — Jesus is indeed the Son of God.***

Here we see that just like God — his words have creative power and his creation responds to his word. Jesus heals this man's body by the power of his word and the man's body responds to his word and is restored.

***Second — Jesus brings life giving Restoration.***

The sign points us to the reality that Jesus is moved by compassion to meet our needs and bring life-giving restoration.

Now people often ask — Pastor — I've had things I've prayed for — a desire to be healed or for a financial need to be covered or fill in the blank — why hasn't God looked on me with compassion to meet that need today?

And that's a great question.

First of all, we need to understand that during Jesus ministry most of his days were ordinary days — and most people didn't experience physical healings. And there's certainly not one time in the Gospels when Jesus made money bags appear. These signs and miracles were meant to validate the uniqueness of Jesus and his ability to bring life and restoration to a world stained with sin and broken by the fall. These miraculous signs show us that God is making good on his promise to deal with sin and bring restoration and renewal to his creation.

These miracles are given to us as a foretaste of what's to come. They're meant to stir up our faith and give us hope for the coming day when God make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found.

So can we ask God for healing today? Certainly. We can ask God for anything. And God is certainly able to heal — but we are not guaranteed that healing today. There's a massive difference between asking for something and feeling entitled to something. We are not promised that healing today — but we are guaranteed healing from all the affects of sin — both physical and spiritual on that day when sin is removed and the affects of the curse are undone.

And at the same time — let's not miss the application for us. Until that day — the bride of Christ — the church is called to be agents of compassion and restoration.

Jerry Bridges once wrote...

***Jesus' acts of healing, then, had a two-fold purpose. Clearly, they were needed as an authentication of His divine Sonship. But in the process Jesus wanted to respond to true human needs. We should not overlook the application to us. While the spiritual needs of people are paramount, we must not ignore their physical needs.***

As we interact with friends and family — our neighbors and networks — let's share the good news of the gospel in word *and* in deed. Let's look at people —holistically — like Jesus looked at people and with compassion — see how we can meet physical and spiritual needs.

## **RECEIVE / REJECT**

***Now that day was the Sabbath. 10 So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed."***

When John was setting the scene at the beginning of the chapter — he intentionally leaves out the detail that this healing took place on the Sabbath. Now he fills in that detail as it become relevant. The Jews see the man who has been healed carrying his mat and they accuse him of breaking the law. Jewish tradition at the time had taken the Sabbath laws given by God and made it much more restrictive. They took what was supposed to be a gift — and made it a burden. According to Jewish Sabbath law at this time — carrying anything from one place to another was work and therefore - it was strictly prohibited on the Sabbath.

***11 But he answered them, "The man who healed me, that man said to me, "Take up your bed, and walk." 12 They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, "Take up your bed and walk'?" 13 Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.***

Under attack and accusation — the man deflects. He says — well — the man who healed me — he told me to take my bed and walk. He blame shifts and — and throws Jesus under the bus. Except — he didn't know Jesus's name or where he was at the moment.

***14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."***

So later, Jesus finds the man in the Temple Courts and addresses his spiritual needs. He tells him — Sin no more so that nothing worse may happen to you.

So what's going on here?

Jesus seeks out the man to bring his attention to his spiritual disability. Jesus says — Your body has been healed — but there's a greater disease called sin that will lead to something far worse than a physical disability. Sin is a terminal illness that's ultimately life threatening.

Jesus brings holistic restoration — physical and spiritual. He has met his physical need. Now he addresses his spiritual need. This is another example of Jesus acting and speaking in truth and in love. Jesus is clear — if he continues to live a life of sin — he will experience judgment for that sin.

So how did he respond to Jesus? Look at verse 15.

***15 The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. 16 And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.***

The man goes and rats on Jesus. He tells the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. Now we don't know the rest of his story. We don't know if he took Jesus's words to heart. But instead of staying in the Temple Courts and contemplating his sinfulness and need for a savior — he sought out the Jews who had accused him of violating the Sabbath so that he could get off the hook. He becomes a CI for the Jews and the focus of their investigation turns to Jesus. They're so focused on their traditions — that they miss the miracle in their midst.

This man welcomed the healing from Jesus — but he doesn't appear to have received his warning about his sin. To not receive him — is to reject him. When it comes to Jesus — there is no neutral position. We can receive him or reject him. There's no third option.

So how does this scene end?

***17 But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." 18 This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.***

Jesus responds to their accusations and his explanation is even more offensive to them than the healing on the Sabbath.

First, Jesus calls God His Father — which communicates a level of intimacy and closeness of relationship that would have been unheard of at that time.

Then he says that even God is at work on the Sabbath. Now they would have agreed with Jesus on this point. In a certain sense — God never stops working. He never stops sustaining life and being involved in the details. Our world does not exist or work without his constant involvement.

But then Jesus connects the dots — God is my Father. He is working. And so, it's ok for me to work as well. Jesus claims to be able to work as God does because He is God's son and they work together. This healing is in fact God the Father working through God the Son to bring restoration to this man.

The Jews understand exactly what Jesus is saying — by calling God his own Father — Jesus is making himself equal with God. And to the Jews — that was blasphemous. John tells us they started to plot his death from that moment on. Clearly — they have decided to reject Jesus.

## **RECAP**

Our hope in this study was to look to John's Gospel to see the real Jesus and how people really responded to him.

The first man came to Jesus to heal his son. He came with mixed motives — driven by desperation for his son. Jesus called him out for his imperfect pursuit and at the same time — healed his son. The man and his household received and believed in Christ.

The second man was approached by Jesus and admitted his helplessness and hopelessness. Jesus healed the man and yet — at the first instance of pressure quickly turned his back on Christ. He was indifferent to Jesus.

And the third group outright rejected him. They valued their traditions and power more than Jesus. They wanted a savior made in their image — not the image of the invisible God made flesh.

Have you considered if the Jesus you believe in is the Real Jesus or merely a Jesus of your own imagination?

The Puritan John Owen warned the people of his day...

***“If you are satisfied with an imaginary Christ, you must be satisfied with imaginary salvation.”***

Friends, do not settle for a Jesus of your own imagination. We need a real salvation — which means we need the real Jesus. And as we look to the Real Jesus will we welcome Jesus for what He gives us as a means to our ends? Or will we receive him simply for who He is and then find that He revives and restores those who truly receive Him?