

WAITING FOR SOMETHING TO HAPPEN

John 5:1-16.

This story will live forever because it is so genuinely human and so refreshingly hopeful. The scene is laid in Jerusalem. It is a Sabbath day and the city is thronged with worshippers who have come up to the feast.

I. The Pool.

There was at Jerusalem, by the sheep-market, a pool, or medicinal spring, to which people resorted from all sides because of the far-famed virtue of its waters. At this pool were five porches. Under these porches, built for protection from the heat of the sun, a motley gathering of people were assembled. The passport to the pool was a common need. Here were gathered great numbers of people suffering from various maladies. There one could see every form of misery, sorrow, and distress. The crowd assembled there was a pitiable sight.

In the pool there was an intermittent spring which gushed up from below at various times. When the waters bubbled up, they were reputed to contain elements that were medicinal and healing. Many believed that these waters possessed rare curative properties. So, sick people from far and near gathered there, waiting for the chance that might give them health again. It was peculiar to this pool that the flow of water came and went. Suddenly, it would bubble up, remain for a moment, and then die away. The moment the people heard the water bubbling up, they would try to get down into the water before it subsided again. Every time those waters bubbled and rose, a flush of hope passed over those impotent people. Each one felt that it was another chance for him. Next moment the water was sinking, and another chance was gone.

What a pitiable sight the porches at Bethesda must have presented, crowded with people who were waiting with strained eyes, watching the still waters of the pool with frenzied anxiety that when the waters began to move there should be some friendly arm on which to rest; and then the mad rush when the moment came, and the enviable one who got there first, and the rest would go back to their porches again to wait once more. In these porches were as many broken hearts as there were broken bodies. All were afflicted with some infirmity or disease, and all were anxious to get rid of their maladies. Some were blind, some were lame, and others were altogether helpless. Many were sorely disappointed; for whilst they had made every effort to get in the water first, others stepped in ahead of them. In this way the most helpless ones had the least chance, unless they happened to have friends there to aid them at the right moment.

II. The Patient.

Among those who thronged the porches, which had been erected by hands of love for the protection of those who were awaiting a periodical disturbance of the waters, was a man who had been afflicted for thirty-eight years. For half a lifetime he had waited for something to happen which had never taken place. Now thirty-eight years is a long time in any man's life. It is a long time for one whose hands are busy with great and thrilling tasks. It is much longer for one who is helpless.

What this man's infirmity was is unknown to us. His illness had apparently been brought on by dissipation. Perhaps in his early days he had lived wildly, and his sin had found him out and left him a cripple.

I can imagine that when his sickness first came upon him his friends were shocked and deeply grieved. Quite likely they went to see him frequently and regularly. But he neither died nor got well. Therefore, their visits grew less frequent, and one by one his friends forgot him or neglected him.

This man was afflicted with impotence in his limbs. He did not have any strength to enable him to plunge into the bubbling springs as they arose with healing power. He did not have any money to hire a carrier to take him down into the pool. He was friendless and shunned by the others at the pool. It had become the established order of things with him that someone stepped down in front of him. Long and numerous contacts with disappointment resulted in a lack of spirit and hope. He had done his best to get healed, but it had come to nothing. Someone else was always first at the healing waters. It was a picture of life framed on the principle of the survival of the fittest, or every man for himself, which is the law of nature, under sin. This man lay within sight of this marvelous pool, suffering double martyrdom — that of being incapable of reaching it, and also of seeing others, less needy, snatch the boon before his very eyes. To him life had no enjoyment. Wearisome days, and months, and years were appointed to him. He had waited so long for something to happen, and so long in vain, that hope was well-nigh dead within him. His oft-repeated disappointments had dulled and hardened him. There was a tinge of bitterness in his broken hopes. He seemed to say, "I have never had a chance." He was almost in the grip of utter despair. The state of this miserable and helpless man represents men spiritually by nature. They are impotent — they cannot of themselves attain to a new life.

Let us notice various things about this particular patient. He was sick. He knew he was sick. He admitted that he was sick. He was miserable. He was helpless. He was humble — not ashamed to take his place among the needy and the helpless. He was poor and could not hire anyone to help him. He was friendless. He was greatly disappointed in seeking healing. He was insistent — kept on trying even though he had failed repeatedly. He was almost in the grip of despair.

III. The Physician.

On this particular day he finds himself face to face with a new experience. He is being searched by the most kindly eyes into which he had ever looked. They were the eyes of Jesus. Jesus went down by the pool because of the needs there. He was there because of the misery and the need, for He is ever the incarnation of mercy. He went where He was needed most and where He might accomplish the most good; not in places of luxury but in the haunts of misery. Jesus walked among the sick and the afflicted unrecognized, and unsought. He went to the place where the sick lay in order that He might bless them. Jesus always goes to the place where hearts are breaking. It was His absorbing object and purpose to alleviate disease and suffering and present salvation. He came to give spiritual life and health to the sick and dying.

Jesus' heart was always moved in the presence of human suffering, regardless of whether that suffering was physical, mental, or spiritual. He longed to relieve suffering. Ever compassionate and gracious, Jesus sought to save men and to give His best gifts to them.

At this pool were many poor people who could not help themselves. Among the very worst cases was this poor man. Being a close observer Jesus saw him. He knew his condition and his circumstances. He had compassion on him. He addressed him by saying, "Wilt thou be made whole?" "Are you willing to be made whole?" "Would you like to get well?" "Do you really want to be well and strong?" Jesus knew that He had little chance of helping the man unless he faced the fact that he was sick and in need of a cure. Jesus must have been seeking to quicken faith and hope in his heart. Jesus must have been encouraging him with the assurance that things he had thought to be impossible were possible by the help of God. The fact that he was helpless and could not do anything for himself, and that he did not have a friend to help him, gave Jesus a chance. Jesus had come to cure him. But did he want to be cured? Willingness to be cured is essential to recovery. Christ does not choose to help people against their wills. The cure is not forced upon you. Jesus will not make us whole against our wills.

Jesus always made sure that the one who came to Him realized his condition, felt his need, and wanted to learn how good it would be to be delivered. "Wilt thou be made whole?" There are two elements in that question. One is desire -- do you want to? Do you want to be saved? Second, there is decision -- why don't you just decide to be? There must be decision as well as desire. "How do I know that Jesus will take me?" Well, you have His word -- "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out."

The Physician's prescription was in the form of a command. "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk." You say that was impossible. Remember all Christ's commandments are gifts. When He says, "Do this!" He pledges Himself to give you the power to do it. As you venture on faith, at the command of Christ, to do something that you had thought was impossible, the necessary power always comes to you. Obedience to Christ always brings the power that is needed. The man was not made better; or merely improved in his condition, but he was made whole. His cure was mysterious, immediate, instantaneous, complete, perfect, and permanent. The Lord always does a lasting work.

This story is a parable of man's spiritual state. All men have the malady of sin. No man can cure himself. No set of men can cure you. Christ alone can do that. He is accessible to all. He does not make any charges for His services. He has never failed with a single patient. He will not force a cure upon you. You must be willing for Him to cure you. All that now stands between you and a perfect soul cure is your own unwillingness.

*It is just like Him, to take our sins away,
It is just like Him, to keep us day by day,
It is just like Jesus, all along the way,
It is just like His great love.*

But to experience spiritual healing, you must come to Jesus and trust Him entirely to cure you. Just as your beloved doctor says to you, "Well, old boy, you are in a pretty bad shape. You need an operation. Will you risk me?" And your answer, "I will." So, Jesus says, "You are a poor lost sinner. Will you let Me be your Saviour?" Say, "I will, Lord Jesus, I will." If you will do so, you will have your sins forgiven and blotted out, and you will become God's child.