

## A Man Once Walked

**Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ...**

I want to begin this morning by imagining what it must have looked like at that pool in Beth-zatha (or as other translations have it – Beth-esda)... first of all, the Bible says that there were many people who came there hoping to be made well of their infirmities... some accounts say that there were crowds of people... and some of these people were blind, some were lame, and some of these people were completely paralyzed from head to toe...

And it says that they came to this well-known spot in Jerusalem in hopes that by some miracle they would be healed and be made whole once again... simply put, they came looking for a better life than the one that they were presently living...

(Have you ever went looking for a place like Beth-zatha?... A place that might offer you a better life than the one that you're living now?)...

Now we don't know much about this pool in Beth-zatha (although you can go to see it today in Jerusalem)... but we know that in Hebrew the word 'Beth-zatha' means 'the House of Grace'... we also know that pagans believed superstitiously that angels would come and *stir up the water* to take away sickness and disease... and we know that some people travelled many miles and waited many years to bathe in (what was believed to be) the magical waters of this pool...

But sadly - we also know that some people never found what they were hoping to find at Beth-zatha... And the Bible tells us that one such man spent 38 years of his life (half – if not most of his life) laying around and waiting for the day that he might find what it was that he was looking for...

And I imagine that as the man waited all of those years, like so many others before him, he believed in his heart that the answers to his problems could be found in that pool... Perhaps he thought to himself, "*if only I could make it to the pool my troubles will go away*"... "*If only I could make it to the pool my problems would be solved*"... "*if only I could make it to the pool my spirit would be restored and I could start living the way that I have always hoped to live*"... And so it was that the paralyzed man was stuck waiting by the pool for 38 long years...

But as I read this story more closely – and I started to wonder what relevance it might have for us today – I wonder if, like the paralyzed man, we can also get stuck waiting near our own pools in life... letting life slip through our fingers and

hoping to find answers to our problems in all the wrong places... wasting all of these precious years...

And sometimes, like the paralyzed man, we also say to ourselves 'if only'... if only we had more money or a bigger house (or a shinier car) – we'd be happy... if only we had a better job, or a better relationship, or a better body – then everyone would love us and our problems would go away... – if only this, if only that... 'then' – we try to convince ourselves 'our problems would be solved' – and life would be so much better...

But I truly believe that those things are a false hope – and when we begin thinking this way, we like the man, also become paralyzed (and we can become stuck in life) waiting for that moment to step into the pool, hoping to find what we've always been looking for...

But it's a moment that may never come... and in our waiting for things to get better – the life that we do have right now - slips through our fingers and passes us by... just like it nearly passed by the man who sat waiting near his own pool for 38 long years...

And the Bible says that when Jesus saw the man lying around after all of those years, waiting for someone (or some thing) to change his lot in life - Jesus spoke words of grace that for the first time gave true meaning to the word Beth-zatha (or house of Grace)...

And rather than carry the man to the pool Jesus tells the man to do what might have seemed impossible at the time... he tells the paralyzed man to, "*Stand up, take his mat and walk away*"...

You see, Jesus was challenging the man to walk away from false hope – and to walk in the way of the Lord... In fact, if the man truly wanted to be healed he had to quit focusing on the pool, and instead, move towards and trust our ever living God (something he had never done before)...

and notice that Jesus doesn't just tell the man to stand up and walk away... he tells the man to take his mat with him (which would have been all of his belongings) – and why would Jesus tell the man to do that?- he told him so that the man might never revisit Beth-zatha again...

In other words, Jesus doesn't want the man to have any reason or excuse to return to the pool... he doesn't want the man to relapse and return to having faith in a

something that can only disappoint... instead, he wants the man to keep his eyes focused on the true source of all healing (and the author of all true miracles – which is God)... and to walk in a new direction with the power of the Lord directing every step of the way...

And friends, that's His message for us today as well... that we, too, should be very conscious of where we put our hope... (in other words, we need to wake up)... and yes, you can put your hope in the things of this world – you can put it in people (or leaders) – you can put your hope in a relationship, in a job, or even in a title... but the story (about the man who sat by that pool for 38 long years) is meant to remind us that the only true hope that we have in this world – and in the World to Come – (is found when we put our faith in Jesus Christ)... the true hope of this world...

And why is Jesus the true hope of this world? – because he is the way to God – he is the truth of God – and with Jesus as the center of it all – he is the only *life worth living* (because it is a life that is designed by God - our Creator...

And so, how does one find true hope?... come to Jesus and put your faith in the promises of God....

Let me close with something that always left an impression on me (and ties in well with our message this morning)... and it relates to a monastery I visited about 10 years ago on a trip to Greece... it was built into one of the most beautiful rock formations I've ever seen (in an area called, 'Meteoro')...

And what's interesting about this holy site is that the men who first spent time at this place were Christians who gave up believing in the things of this world (and just like many are today – they were so disillusioned – and fed up with all of the lies and the hypocrisy (not to mention the uncertainty and injustice of this world)...

And so, this group of believers left the world behind (and instead, dedicated their lives to Jesus) and making him their biggest hope (and the central focus of their lives)...

And in one of the rooms of these monasteries is a narthex with four walls... and on one wall is Alexander the Great (a man who for the Greeks has always represented the 'worldly man')... a man that conquered the world of his day (and had every imaginable luxury on earth)... and in the picture he's depicted as the conqueror with sword in hand (and wealth in his courts)... which, as you know, is the hope of so many...

4

On the side walls are images of the Christians – some of whom are being crucified, or held in prisons...other images show them being attacked by lions or being skinned alive...suffering for their faith in Jesus and holding rue to their calling as Children of God...but also reminding us that our faith is a hope we so often struggle to keep

But as you leave this beautiful room as if you were to leave this earth you see another image...and that's the image of Alexander the Great as a skeleton in a coffin (a symbol of death for those who invest their hope in this world) – (and all the Children of God surrounding this enemy that has plagued the world since the fall of Adam) wearing the crown of life and in the presence of our Lord – where victory is won – for those who never lost their hope of a better world to come)...

Friends, I want to remind you that if your greatest hope can be found in this world that perhaps your hope is too small, but when you put your hope in Jesus Christ – you're putting your hope in the promises of God – that through him our souls can find more than we ever imagined – a life that goes on living (even after the death from this world) – and a peace that no money could ever buy... that is the promise of God...and he hope of every believer.

And so, let me ask you – where is your hope?...

May the peace of Christ come to you quickly ... May His wisdom and His love be your guide for the road ahead...and may you find renewed hope in the promises of God...

In Jesus' name we pray....

Amen!