

HANG IN THERE!

Today's Text: Jn 5: 1- 16

Extracts:

Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first ... was made well of whatever disease he had. *Now a certain man was there, who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." And immediately the man was made well [Jn 5: 2-9]*

In 1974 (when he was 19 years old), James Bain was sentenced to life imprisonment by a Florida (USA) court for kidnapping a 9-year-old boy and raping him in a nearby bush.¹ He was convicted largely on the strength of the victim's eye witness identification of a man with bushy sideburns and a mustache. The boy's uncle, a former assistant principal at a high school knew a student who had such features-James Bain. His petitions year after year for DNA testing to prove his innocence were thrown out but he never gave up. Finally, in 2009, with the help of attorneys from the Florida Innocence Project, DNA tests cleared him and he was freed. A year earlier, Florida had passed a new law that innocent people falsely imprisoned should be paid \$50,000 for each year spent in prison. When Bain was set free (at age 54), he collected \$1.75 million!

James Bain was in jail for 35 years. He did not give up protesting his innocence. In the end, his persistence paid off. He was not only set free, he became a millionaire! How about you? What personal or family problems have weighed you down to the point of considering suicide? Hang in there because help is on the way. In this week's study, a man that had had an infirmity for 38 years without respite kept coming to the water pool, hoping for somebody to put him into the water for healing Then, Jesus showed up and changed his life forever! Let us find out what happened.

¹ Based on "DNA clears man after 35 years in prison," http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/34467096/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/?GT1=43001 ; Thurs., Dec. 17, 2009.

1. Background: A crippled man waits for healing for 38 years!

It is remarkable to see a growing number of people these days that have one distress story or another to tell. You may see somebody on the train or in the bus, sitting with a hand on his/her chin, lost in deep thought. You may be talking with somebody and his/her responses suggest to you that they are not listening; their minds are elsewhere. As you probe a little beyond the surface, the litany of problems can discourage you- sickness in the family, unemployment without hope of a new job, crippling bills, distressed marriages, barrenness, drug or alcohol addiction, etc. What runs through all the stories is that they have tried all they know how without success. Well, this week's study is for such people. To them, the Lord is saying, "Hang in there because help is on the way!"

A man who had been crippled for 38 years heard about a water pool in Jerusalem where healing was possible. He was told that each year at a certain time, an angel went down into the pool and stirred up the water. Whoever got in first after it had been stirred got healed. Each year, he kept coming but did not have the chance to get in, not to talk of being healed [**Jn 5: 4-5**]. Yet, he did not give up. The odds that were against him can be summarized as follows:

a) *Competition was keen!*

The man was not the only one seeking to be healed. We are told that there was "a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water" [**v. 3**]. You can imagine the kind of competition there. It was a zero-sum game, that is, what one person won, the others lost. In such a situation, there would be war among the sick seeking healing in that pool. There would be acts of sabotage so as to upstage everybody else in need. No one would care what happened to others.

You may be facing a similar situation today. With unemployment rates so high in most countries, especially among young people and fresh graduates from school, every advertised job has more applicants than necessary. State-run unemployment relief programmes are rapidly depleted. Medical insurance or coverage is non-existent and yet more people are falling sick from malnutrition or unhealthy living conditions. As people try to drown out worry, they take to alcohol or drugs which put additional pressure on the limited state or family budgets.

b) *But human help was limited*

The man reported that there was no one to put him into the pool when the water was stirred. Each time, while he was coming, another sick person stepped in before him [**v. 7**]. In other words, human help for him was either limited or non-existent. We recall the case of the paralytic man that four men brought to Jesus in Capernaum. When they found the crowd

around Jesus too impregnable, they broke through the roof of where Jesus was and let down the sick man on a bed [Mk 2: 1-4]! The sick man in our story was not that lucky. Some people are able to rely on family or other connections to beat the competition but the majority of us can only afford to wait like others by the water pool of hope that may never materialize.

Sometimes, your situation may be beyond human solution. For example, like the woman with the issue of blood, she had exhausted all her wealth on physicians and after twelve years, she still had no respite [Mk 5: 25-26]. Some people may have been told by doctors that they had exhausted all their medical options and all that was left was for them to go home and wait for death. Some people may be on a dangerous stretch of a journey where all human hope of being saved is gone. For example, the ship taking Paul to Rome ran into a storm. The experts battled to save the ship but when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on them, all hope of being saved by human help was lost [Acts 27: 14-20]. Yet, the crippled man by the water pool did not give up. He kept coming back and hoping for healing!

c) *Then unexpected help came from Jesus!*

On that special day which that man did not expect, Jesus *happened* to pass by. Jesus saw him lying there and *He “knew that he already had been in that condition a long time”* [Jn 5: 6]. The word of God says, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good” [Prov. 15: 3]. If it was the stirring up of the water by an angel that brought the crippled man to that place, you can be sure that he knew something about God and how to pray to Him. After 38 years without human help or solution, the man knew that only God could do it for him. Since Jesus knew the man’s state and his heart, He came to him because His Father (that the sick man prayed to) dwells in Him [Jn 14: 10].

When human help fails, some people go to sorcerers and witch-doctors or gurus but they can only produce limited results. For example, Pharaoh’s magicians could use enchantments to turn their sticks into snakes, as Moses had done with his by God’s inspiration, but Moses’ rod (thrown down by Aaron) swallowed up the magicians’ snakes [Ex.7: 1-12]. Along the way, the magicians’ tricks failed and they said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God” [Ex. 8: 18-19]. *That is why the word of God says, “The fear of man is a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe”* [Prov. 29: 25].

When Jesus asked the man if he wanted to be made well, he answered that there was no one to put him in the pool. Then, Jesus said to him, “Rise, take up your bed and walk.” The man was instantly made well. He took up

his bed and walked [**Jn 5: 6-8**]! That was after waiting for thirty-eight years! And *help came from unexpected quarters in an unexpected way!*

That is good news for all of us. The man did not know who it was that had healed him because Jesus withdrew soon after. However, later, Jesus found the man inside the temple and He said to him, “See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you” [**vv. 10-15**]. The word of God says, “Beloved, I pray that you may *prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers*” [**3 Jn 2**]. That suggests that, even though sin is not the cause of every disability [**Jn 9: 1-3**], our physical well being is closely linked to our spiritual prosperity. *Sin is to the soul as sickness is to the body. It was the sick man’s faith in God that kept his hope alive that enabled him to meet Jesus. Therefore, his healing was both physical and spiritual. To sin thereafter was to backslide or show ingratitude to God for what He had done for him.* From the foregoing, we can underline some keys to victory after a long wait.

2. Keys to victory after a long wait

After hearing an uplifting testimony like the one above, it is quite easy for many people to say, “Well, that’s good but my case is different!” What makes your case different is your attitude! By paying attention to the following, you can deal with it:

a) *Determine the source of your hope*

As early as possible, you must realize that the battle is not yours but the Lord’s [**2 Chron. 20: 15**]. The centurion was a Roman soldier. When his servant fell ill, he knew where the hope of his recovery lay- with Jesus. So, he swallowed his superior airs (as a Roman officer) and went to Jesus that he knew could heal his servant. What was Christ’s response? He told those around Him, “I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” [**Lk 7: 1-9**]. The woman with the issue of blood, who had been in that state for twelve years and even grew worse after wasting her wealth on physicians came to Jesus and said to herself, “If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well” What did Jesus say to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction” [**Mk 5: 25-34**].

Hope is the heart of faith [**Heb. 11: 1**]. When you hope in God and diligently seek Him, He will reward you in accordance with His timing and purpose. The Psalmist says, “I will lift up my eyes to the hills-from where comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” He will preserve you from all evil, your going out and coming in “from this time forth, and even forevermore” [**Ps. 121: 1-2, 7-8**].

b) *Focus on the outcome, not your problem*

Having left the matter in God's hands, you are set free to focus on the desired outcome, no longer on your problem. It was the angel sent by God that stirred up the water in the pool in Jerusalem and whoever got in first became healed. When Jesus asked the crippled man, "Do you want to be made well?" he did not reel off about his problems in the last thirty-eight years. Instead, he demonstrated faith in his healing. All he wanted to do was to get into that stirred pool first and get healed. That was the faith that Jesus rewarded.

Stop whining about your situation! ***Your God is bigger than your problem. When you lament your situation, you are actually telling God that you do not trust Him.*** The word of God says, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" [Jam. 1: 2-3]. We are expected to "glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" [Rom. 5: 3-5]. The Psalmist adds, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God" [Ps. 43: 5]. ***Focus on God's promises and His record with people of faith [Heb. 11: 4-40].***

c) *Serve God while waiting and hoping*

You can be sure that Satan finds work for idle hands, as a popular saying goes. If you are merely waiting for God without doing something, the devil will torment you with fear. He comes in various ways, such as thoughts or friends and sympathizers who will seem to have ideas and answers to all your problems, all of which may be misleading! You saw how "helpful" Job's friends (Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar) were. Even his wife told him to curse God and die [Job 2: 9-10]!

The only way to fill the void for your own success is to serve God while you are waiting and hoping. ***In a restaurant, a person who serves guests is called a waiter. S(he) must respect the wishes of customers, no matter how he/she feels. S(he) cannot hurry them up to finish their meals, even when closing time has come. Every now and then, s(he) comes with a smile to seek after their welfare! That is the attitude that you are expected to have.*** The Psalmist says, "I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord" [Ps. 27: 13-14].

d) *Testify to others when relief comes*

The crippled man was healed by Jesus on a Sabbath day. As he carried his bed and walked, the Jews said to him, “It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed.” He answered them, “He who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your bed and walk.’” Later, after he had met Jesus again in the temple, he went back to the Jews and told them that it was Jesus that had made him well [**Jn 5: 9-15**].

Your testimony can water other people’s faith. Therefore, you should go and win souls for Christ with the good news of your deliverance from what the world said was impossible. Do not be afraid or ashamed to confess Jesus because those who confess Him before men, He will also confess before His Father in heaven [**Matt. 10: 32**].

3. Conclusion: If you give up, you can’t win!

When James Bain was asked what sustained him in prison for 35 years for a crime he did not commit, he gave credit to his deep faith, adding, “I am not angry because I have got God.” Soon after he had been healed, the crippled man in this week’s Bible story went straight into the temple where Jesus found him. Then he went boldly and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well [**Jn 5: 13-15**]. In both cases, it took more than human optimism to deal with their situations. *It took faith in God and much more clearly, faith in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God.*

Jesus assured His disciples, “let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me” [**Jn 14: 1**]. So, hang in there because if you give up, you cannot win!