

God Cares for the Addict

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John 5:1-10

It is very easy for us to dismiss those who are addicts. They are there in that state because of their own choices. They should know better. If they had not wanted the drug, alcohol, or whatever they went to, they would not be where they are today. The problem is that such lack of love leaves us far removed from the Father's love. For Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. Jesus died for the sin of addiction as much as any sin. Moreover, we often fail to see our own addiction habits, when we only focus on the "major" addictions of drugs, alcohol and pornography. Anything that captures us in a physical or mental or spiritual cage from which we are not free to leave is an addiction. Should I mention other kinds of addictions such as being a shopaholic? Or, addictions to TV programs, hobbies, collections, or perhaps even addicted to emotions such as rage, or the need for attention?

Last week, we looked at how God cares for the lonely. We saw Hagar alone in the desert. The angel of the Lord came and found her. I said that the question the angel asked was very important, "Where have you come from; and, where are you going?" If you don't know how you got to where you are, you will not be able to understand where you are going wrong. If you don't know where you are going, you have no purpose or direction in life; and, you will always be lost.

John 5:1 NIVO

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews.

² 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.

³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie--the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.

⁴ For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. (NKJ)]

⁵ One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

⁶ 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?"

⁷ "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."

⁸ Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."

⁹ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath,

I included v.4 even though it is lacking in the earliest MSS. It appears in Byzantine MSS. It gives an explanation to why the paralytic wanted to get into the water when it was stirred. For the sake of the story, it helps.

Here was an invalid. The Greek word means he was in weakness. He had been in this condition for 38 years. If he was paralyzed, he would have neither muscle nor bone strength to get up and walk, without a full miracle of re-creation in his limbs. Yet, before we focus on miracles, let us focus on Christ's compassion and the man's

other weakness. Jesus came to a man who was paralyzed in a condition from which he was not finding freedom. Jesus had compassion for him.

Sabbath – Rest in wholeness.

Another, important statement in the text is that Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath. The religious leaders always complained that Jesus healed on the Sabbath. It seems that Jesus does this intentionally, perhaps to irritate them. Yet, there is more to Jesus' healing on the Sabbath.

Jesus healed to make people whole. In fact, that is what Jesus asked the man. "Do you want to be whole." We understand it to mean, well as in health. Do you want to have health? Sin brought brokenness to our world. When people are lame, paralyzed, held in bodily illness, they are not whole. Jesus asks, Do you want to be whole?

Jesus healed on the Sabbath because as the Messiah, he was revealing the age of restoration, which is the nature of the kingdom of God.

⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. (Isa. 35:6 NIVO)

Jesus healed on the Sabbath because healing was God's rest from illness.

Sabbath means **rest**. For Jesus, healing on the Sabbath was giving to the sick, the fullest sense of rest from their disease. Rest is restoration. Jesus heals to bring people into rest. Those who are oppressed by demons, He gives rest from oppression. Those who are crippled, he gives rest from deformity.

Although this man had a physical paralysis, I would like to address this in terms of addiction. The two share similar features. Both speak about being stuck in a condition you cannot change.

1. Jesus cares for those in bondage of addiction.

When the religious leaders learn of the miraculous healing, they do not rejoice for what God has done. Instead, they rebuke Jesus for breaking the Law, as they saw it. (As I said, Jesus was not breaking the Law. He was fulfilling it.)

¹⁶ So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him.

¹⁷ Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."
(Jn. 5:16-17 NIVO)

Jesus is still working miracles. He still cares for those who are afflicted. Also, Jesus tells us that the Father did not stop creating on day 6. The Father is still working, even on the Sabbath.

Jesus gives life to whomever He pleases.

²¹ For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. (Jn. 5:21 NIVO)

Jesus shows us that God cares for those in bondage of the body, those in illness, deformity, or other weaknesses.

Jesus also cares for those who are in the bondage of addiction.

In some ways, addiction and paralysis have things in common. Both hold you in a cage which locks you into something you cannot free yourself. However, often in addiction, people lock themselves in the cage, and prefer it over freedom.

Addiction can be a bondage of the body. Some drug addictions are **physical** in nature. The body adapts to the drug and you must go through withdrawal to be free of the drug.

Yet, most addictions are also a paralysis of the **mind** and the **soul**.

There is a demonic aspect of most addictions. The devil does not want you to be free. Demons latch their tentacles into your mind and soul to keep you in oppression.

Even if a person knows they need to get free they have a hard time finding the way to freedom. Even when people go to rehab several times, they seem to quickly return to the cage.

The first thing you need to know is that God cares for you.

Today, know this. If you are struggling with an addiction, know that God still cares for you. God did not create you so you would be locked into addiction. Jesus came to set you free.

Every addict is someone's family member. Brother, father, sister, mother... Even though, families are often abused by those who are under addiction, we still want to see you free.

2. If you are an addict, God cares; but you must know that freedom means you must be willing to leave the cage.

Addiction is a prison because people are not free. However, the prison is often one of self-choice. And the reason so many cannot leave, is because they enjoy the addictive pleasure that keeps them in bondage.

Jesus asked a penetrating question:

Do you want to be well?

Here is the insight to this question. You cannot leave an addiction when you are still enjoying the fruit of its delights.

Heroin addicts long for the peace of the drug, even if it ruins everything else. Getting that peace hit is all that matters. That same morphine escape is what is experienced in milder forms by other drugs, including alcohol. As long as the addict loves the escape, they keep hitting the drug.

Sexual addiction is the same. As long as a person wants the pleasure of his or her sexual deviant behavior, they will keep running to it, no matter how far down it drags them. As long as you want to enjoy forbidden fruit, the bondage remains.

Such bondage is mental, emotional, physical and spiritual in nature. The mind adapts physically to that which raises serotonin for pleasure. People think they are natural to this state. No. Their brain adapted to the pleasure they sought. Now the brain expects that return of pleasure.

It is also spiritual. Addiction has a demonic nature. The forces of darkness enslaves those held in destructive behaviors and will not let them leave.

Do you want to be well?

A conversation with a homosexual man. Through the years of ministry I have had opportunity to talk with many homosexual men. One day I had such a conversation. The man wanted to recruit me to his sordid passion. When I began to share with him the Scriptures about homosexuality, he acknowledged that he had prayed many times about leaving the sexual bondage.

As I talked with him, the Holy Spirit brought this Scripture to my mind. I told him what Jesus said to the paralyzed man. Do you want to get well? I told the man that he will never be able to leave his sexual misdirection as long as he found pleasure in it.

As long as you enjoy your addiction, you will stay with the addiction, no matter how much it hurts you, or how much it hurts others

around you. You are choosing pleasure instead of facing the hard and painful reality necessary to leave your bondage.

Another insight from this passage:

In addiction, your excuses are the lock that holds you in the cage.

Here is another insight. The addicted are paralyzed in their excuses. Part of the bondage to addiction is accepting lies as if they are truth.

Your excuses are as much of what keeps you in bondage as the addiction.

Back at the pool, the paralyzed man made excuses for why he couldn't get well. When the water stirs, I have no one to help me get into the water so I can get well. There is always someone else who beats me to the opportunity. He couldn't roll?

If getting in the pool to be healed is the issue, there is a way to get into the pool. Roll.

But what if I drown?

But what if you are healed?

You will never leave the addiction if you are still feasting on its pleasure.

You will never leave the addiction as long as you make excuses for why you cannot leave.

3. If you are addicted, God can set you free.

There is a famous line in the Eagles classic hit, Hotel California -
"You can check out any time you want; but you can never leave."

The devil say of addiction: You can check out of the cage any time you want; but can never leave.

It was the same message the demons spoke to the paralyzed man by the pool – "You are here to stay. You can never leave where you are."

Until Jesus came along.

The devil's lies have no power to resist God. God creates new!

Here is what is amazing about this miracle by the pool. Jesus did not wait for the man to stop making excuses. He didn't tell him, "Next time try rolling into the pool." No.

Jesus commands the man, **Pick up your bed and walk.** Immediately, life came into the man's limbs, and he jumped up. In this case, it was Jesus who set the man free.

Jesus spend no more time discussing the man's condition. He merely commanded him to get up. It was a miracle. If you have laid on your side for 38 years, you have not muscle or bone mass to be able to stand up and walk. Jesus, who is the Word of God, as John says, spoke the word of life (John 1:4) to him, and he got up whole!

Is someone here today struggling with addiction and you have not been able to leave the cage? God can break the power of the cage. God can set you free!

Suffered long enough

I watched a video of a man who gave his testimony of being set free from addiction to pain medication. He had been in a car accident. He had been prescribed with pain medications to help him with his injuries. However, he continued to seek the medications. Hooked on his medication, his family sent him to rehab several times. Eventually, his family left him. Now, once again in rehab. He was crying out to God to help him get free. He was taking a shower while he was crying out to Jesus. Suddenly, Jesus came to him and embraced him with His love. Jesus spoke to him, "You have suffered long enough with this. You are free." Immediately, the man knew a change had come over him. He felt released from his cage of addiction. From that time on, he was free, and remained free.

If you are here today and you realize you are still in the cage of addiction, God cares for you.

Jesus came to set the prisoner free. He wants you to be free. Jesus can break the power of your cage. Call on Jesus' name. Ask to be set free! Don't stop calling on Him, until you are set free!