

Wilt Thou Be Made Whole?

by John Gowans

We have the power to choose and change through the Holy Spirit, and Jesus offers us wholeness and the power to overcome our weaknesses and shortcomings.

Duration: 29:24

Scripture: Matthew 7:9, John 5:1

Topics: "Spiritual Transformation", "Personal Freedom"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of singing songs of liberty and freedom. He highlights the tendency of people to blame external factors for their problems, such as their upbringing or genes, but states that the scriptures teach that we have the power to change and become better through the spirit of Jesus. The preacher shares a story of a Salvation Army convert who was able to transform his life with the help of God. He challenges the audience to consider their own lives and asks what kind of person they are, encouraging them to embrace the offer of wholeness and transformation from Jesus.

Transcript

I want to read some verses from St. John's Gospel, chapter 5, and beginning at verse 1. St. John's Gospel, chapter 5, and verse 1. You might like to follow it in your translation. I'm going to read from the New English Bible translation. Later on, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals.

Now, at the sheep pool in Jerusalem, there was a place with five colonnades. Its name in the language of the Jews is Bethesda. In these colonnades, there lay a crowd of sick people, blind, lame, and paralyzed.

Among them was a man who had been crippled for 38 years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and was aware that he had been ill a long time, he asked him, do you want to recover? Sir, he replied, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is disturbed, but while I'm moving, someone else is in the pool before me. Jesus answered, rise to your feet, take up your bed and walk.

The man recovered instantly, took up his stretcher, and began to walk. That day was a Sabbath, so the Jews said to the man who had been cured, it's Sabbath, you're not allowed to carry your bed on the Sabbath. He answered, the man who cured me said, take up your bed and walk.

They asked him, who is the man who told you to take up your bed and walk? But the cripple who had been cured didn't know, for the place was crowded and Jesus slipped away. A little later, Jesus found him in the

temple and said to him, now that you're well again, leave your sinful ways or you may suffer something worse. The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had cured him.

Now what kind of person are you? One of the disadvantages of these beautiful modern halls is that the preacher can hardly see the congregation. So I'm not at all sure what kind of people you are physically, although I suppose it doesn't matter very much. Ladies, it doesn't matter if you're a size 8 or a size 28, it's of relative insignificance.

What kind of people are you intellectually? Well, some of you are extremely bright, I know, and some of you are not so bright like me. But it hardly matters in the long term whether you're an intellectual or not. What I want to know is what kind of person the interior person is.

What kind of person are you? Are you a positive person, jumping out of bed, all gay and cheerful and happy? I'm not that kind of person at all. I'm not nearly nice before 10 o'clock in the morning. What kind of person are you? What does it matter to the people you live with what kind of person you are? Perhaps you're a negative person.

You see everything on the black side. The worst thing is bound to happen and you're preparing for it. You've written out what you're going to say at your own funeral.

Or get somebody else to say it for you, perhaps. You're a negative kind of person. Well, you know, these kinds of things do matter because they have an effect on the people you live with.

What does it matter to the people you live with if you have the intelligence of Einstein and you're a pain in the neck? What does it matter if you've got three degrees? One in philosophy, one in mathematics and one in theology. If you are always flying off the handle and you're a volcano about to erupt and people avoid you because you're so difficult to live with. What kind of person are you inside? That's what counts.

I'll tell you a secret. I've read the biography of a certain general among my predecessors. I won't tell you what her name is.

But we've had two with the same name. And they both apparently had the same problem because this general lady I'm talking about, and I wouldn't like her to hear what I'm saying, this general confesses to having a short fuse and suffering fools badly. Now that's fair enough, isn't it? That's a very human side to have.

But it's what kind of person you are, your personality. Are you a grudge bearer? Do you hold things against people? Or are you quick to forgive and to forget? Well now, when we talk about patience, when we talk about unprejudice, when we talk about tolerance, when we talk about sympathy, when we talk about respect for the other person, when we talk about long-suffering and loving-kindness, when we talk about compassion, there we're talking about spiritual things. And it's what kind of a person you are in that area that really matters.

And I want to ask you this morning, what kind of spiritual person are you? What makes us what we are? What decides what quality of person we are? They tell me that there are millions of people in the world who believe that they are in this life the kind of person they are in this life because of what they were in a previous life. There are millions of people who believe that they are what they are and they cannot escape from what they are. They're destined, they're fated to be what they are because of what they were in some previous life.

I don't believe that. I don't believe it. Others say that the stars are responsible.

You know, there isn't a newspaper or a woman's magazine that doesn't have a page on what the stars foretell. I won't ask for a show of hands, but I dare say there are a few here that before they start on their week, they look up to see what kind of week they're going to have because of the star they were born in. Now you explain to me how many stars are there? I don't even know.

Supposing there's eight of these signs of the zodiac, then maybe ten. You see, I don't even know and I don't even care because I'm sure it doesn't matter. How can it be that 10% of the population have to, and I quote from a recent magazine, a tenth of the population this week have to be careful in matters concerning a friend.

Well, big deal. Some people believe that they are what they are because of what the stars foretell. What a lot of rubbish.

Shakespeare knew better in his play about Julius Caesar. Cassius and Brutus are talking, and Cassius says to Brutus, the fault, the trouble, the problem, the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves that we are underlings, that we're nobodies, that we're nothing. It's not the stars that have made us what we are.

The fault is in ourselves. If we're something less than perfect, it's no good our blaming the stars for it. Do you know what the modern excuse for what we are is? It's our genes.

I don't mean the Levi's, you know. I mean the G spelt with a G. Everybody says we are what our genes make us. Well, I've got to concede that our genes have some influence upon our personalities.

Some of us have inherited certain dispositions in our personalities that have come with our genes. We come from a long line of red-headed, bad-tempered Irishmen, and that's why we're what we are. That's the way the logic goes.

Or they say that they were born in Scotland like me, and that's why I'm so mean. It's not totally true, is it? Because we've inherited something in our mother's milk and the blood of our parents, are we stuck with what we are? Must we stay what we are? Are we fated to be what our genes dictate? I don't think so. All the sons of thieves are not thieves, and all the children of murderers do not murder.

The influence, it seems, is not decisive. Our genes do not decide everything, though they may determine the field of our spiritual conflict internally. They do not decide how could they when I know pairs of identical twins who are totally different in personality, one being mean and one being generous, one being bitter and sharp-tongued, and one being ready to forgive everybody.

It's not in our genes. And the Salvation Army has proved that a person is not what he is or she is because of their genes. You want a story, here's a story.

It comes from the tales of the converts made under the ministry of the angel Adjutant Kate Lee. She set her eye upon somebody she met in the street. She saw a man selling newspapers every day at the corner of the street, and she took one look at him, and she was an expert, this Adjutant of the Salvation Army.

She took one look at him, and she knew he was stone drunk. His eyes were glazed, and he was flogging the newspapers. And every day she passed him, he was there dead drunk and flogging his newspapers.

She tried to speak to him. She couldn't reach him. She prayed God to give her the grace somehow to win this man.

She inquired what his name was. Nobody knew his name. They knew what they called him.

They called him Old Born Drunk. Why did they call him Old Born Drunk? Because he was always drunk, and because he was born drunk. When he came into the world, the doctor lifted him up and said with disgust, the mother of this baby is drunk, and the baby is drunk.

He was born drunk. The angel Adjutant was going to win him for Christ, and she wooed his family. She discovered that he was only 40 years old, though he looked something like over 60.

And one day he found his way to the mercy seat, and he never drank another drop as long as he lived. He was born drunk, damaged from birth. But the power of Christ is able to break the chain of our genes even, and to make us more than conquerors through him who loved us and gave himself for us.

We don't sing enough these days the songs of liberty that we used to sing. My chains fell off, my heart was free. I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

What a sad mess is made in many people's lives, and they say it's the fault of the stars, it's the fault of my upbringing, it's the fault of my genes. The scriptures say we don't need to stay the way we are. The scriptures say it does not yet appear what we shall be, because into the equation that breaks the chain of every kind is introduced the power of the Spirit of Jesus, who can make men better than they dreamed they could be, and something totally different to what they are.

Of course, many people feel that they're prisoners of their past, and the devil loves the past. Have you noticed he has a technique? He loves to rake up the past. My life is not whiter than snow, I've made millions of mistakes, and you know what the devil loves to do for John in his quiet moments? He loves to take the rake and to rake it all up again, and remind me of my failures of yesterday.

Doesn't he do the same with you? If he can get you to dwell on your past, he's got you, because there's not much glorious in the past. I've failed here, I've done things I'm not proud of, and you can sit there and think of the way in which the devil rakes up your past to your disadvantage. He wants to damn us with our past, and when we try to be better, he says, look at your past, you can't be better.

Look at the times you've failed, you'll never succeed. Look at the mess you've made, you'll always be a mess. He wants us to be buried in our past, and we need liberating from our past.

We are not the prisoners of our past. Don't let your yesterday decide your today or your tomorrow. The devil is the father of lies.

We don't have to stay the way we are. He brings out every skeleton from our cupboard. He rakes up all the rotting rubbish of long ago to make us believe that our future is permanently, irredeemably damaged by our past.

And it's not true. It's not true. Brothers and sisters, we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses who can prove it.

Here's Saint Peter whose past is unspeakable. Here's Saint Peter who denied his Lord in the presence of his Lord. Imagine that Jesus looking at him, and he says, I don't know him.

I don't know him. I've got nothing to do with him. How on earth can a man like that be redeemed from a past like that? And here is the Jesus, the same Jesus, the betrayed Jesus, walking with Peter along the shore.

And Peter wonders what he's going to say. And Jesus says, after a long silence, Peter, John's son, do you love me? Then Peter became the rock upon which the Christian church was to be built. He wasn't the prisoner of his past, and neither are we.

We are not the prisoners of our past because we have a God who can wipe out our past. God forgives. It is in the nature of love to love, and the proof of love is the completeness of its forgiveness.

Listen to the prophet Micah. Who is a God like you who pardons sin and forgives transgression? You will again have compassion on us. You will tread our sins underfoot and hurl our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

That's the kind of God that we have. So we are not the prisoners of our past. He will hurl our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

I love that old song we used to sing years ago, never to be remembered anymore. Never to be remembered anymore. He took my burden of sinfulness and cast it into the sea of forgetfulness.

Never to be remembered anymore. We are not the prisoners of our past. Thumb your nose at the devil.

Tell him to go to hell where he belongs. A Christian can tell the devil to go to hell. It's okay.

Tell him to go to hell when he insists that because you've made a mess in the past, there's no hope for the future. Let him prove that you are not the prisoner of your past. There is a sea of God's forgetfulness.

My sins rose as high as the mountain. I used to sing it when I was a kid with the accent. Did you use to sing it? My sins rose as high as the mountain.

They all disappeared in the fountain. He wrote my name down for a palace and crown. Bless his dear name.

I'm free. It was good doctrine we taught our kids in those days. Don't you think? Listen, we are not the prisoners of our past.

It isn't our stars or our upbringing or our past that decides what we are. What decides what we are? The simple answer is so simple that I hesitate to tell you. What decides what kind of person you are? You decide what kind of person you are.

Now let that sink in because perhaps it hasn't been heard like that from a preacher for some time. Listen please. You are deciding what kind of person you are.

You are to blame for what you are. How dare I say that? I say that because as you heard in the scripture reading I read, we have a saviour who says, do you want to be made whole? The ball's in your court. It's over to you.

You can't say, well, I can't be whole. I've got these genes, you know. And I've got these weaknesses in my past, you know.

And I was born under the wrong star. And he stands there and says, look, will thou be made whole? Do you want to get better? Now the ball is in your court. It's up to you.

If you say, yes, I do, you'll be made whole. And if you say, no, I don't, you'll stay the way you are. You're to blame for what you are.

I'm to blame for what I am because I know a saviour who can make me strong by His Holy Spirit. And if I'm weak, it's my fault because He stood there every day of my life saying, John, do you want to get better? Do you want to be kinder? Do you want to be purer? Do you want to be more honest? Do you want to be more loving, more forgiving? Do you want it? Do you want it? If you want it, it's yours. Do you want the power to be a better person? If you want it, it's yours.

And if you haven't got it, it's your fault. It's offered in Christ. Please notice the word.

I love the word in the King James Version where Jesus says to this poor fellow that's been in a bad way for years. Thirty-eight years. Jesus says to him, Will thou be made whole? Will thou? I will, says Jesus.

I want to do it. But I can't do it without your permission. Will thou be made whole? Do you want the past to be faced? Do you want new blood to ring through your veins? Do you want new sparkle in your eyes? Do you want clean hands and a pure heart? Will thou? Will thou? And in Jesus' name, I'm looking at you in the darkness of this building and I'm saying to you each, Will thou? Will thou? Because if you will, He will.

That's the gospel. Many Christians are weak when they could be strong. They could do so much and they do so little.

And they blame all kinds of things. But the real source of our weakness is our lack of power, which He is promising to provide. Come unto me, He says.

Will thou be made whole? So what is our contribution to our strengthening? Our contribution is a willingness to let Him. Just let Him. Don't make any excuses.

Don't say it so long. I've got used to being a spiritual cripple. I've learnt to live with my shortcomings.

What a crime to learn to live with your shortcomings when your shortcomings can be healed and you can be made whole. Too many salvationists have settled for mediocre Christianity when beautiful, magnificent, superb, Christ-like Christianity is available to them because Jesus says by His Spirit, Will thou be made whole? The salvation army will be renewed. You want it renewed? It will be renewed when every salvationist responds to the question of Jesus.

Will thou be made whole? With yes, Lord. Please, Lord, do it now, Lord. The salvation army was created to be a holy army and it's not.

Salvationists were created to be Christ-like people and we're not. We're petty and we're small and we're partisan and we pick and we criticise and we destroy each other. God forgive us and make the salvation army whole.

Starting with its general. But you've got to want it. You've got to say yes, please.

There's a Holy Spirit's energy let loose in this world and anybody who wants it can have it. And half our problem in these days in our beloved army that we love like our life is that we are not receiving the

available power and we're trying to manage in our own strength. We think if we have better structures, if we change the system, if we change the uniform, if we alter the regulations, if we do it differently, if we have better buildings, if we have better public relations and we introduce the media more often, we'll win.

We won't. We'll win when we say yes, Lord. Yes, Lord, please.

The power we need. Power we need. I've got no... They ask me, you know, what's your policy? What's your strategy for the salvation army? I haven't got any other strategy than to get the salvation army to claim what is available to it by a generous and loving God who will make the people of God people like Jesus.

And he wants to do it. The question is, do you want it? Will that? You can go on as you are, mediocre and mealy-mouthed, an apologetic Christian who is cloak and dagger and half the people you live with haven't noticed you're Christian because there's not much different about you. You can go on like that if you like, but here stands the Master.

You may have been in a mess for 10 years, 20 years, 30 years, 38 years spiritually damaged. It doesn't matter how long. Now Christ is making His offer.

Wilt thou be made whole? Please say yes. Please say yes. Your own future can be so much more beautiful.

Your own future and the future of those you love and the future of your core and the future of this army and the future of this country can be influenced by one person who hears the voice of Jesus say, Wilt thou? And says, yes, please. Yes, please. It's so elementary that we don't like it.

It's so simple. Let me recite to you the promise of Jesus. He looked one day into the faces of His congregation and He said, Some of you are parents.

You've got kids. Now if your kids say, Give us an egg, Daddy. Do you give them a stone? Or if they ask for a bit of fish, do you give them scorpions? No, no, no, says Jesus.

If you then, bad as you are, know how to give your kids what's good for them, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit? To whom? To those who ask Him. Ask. You have not because you ask not.

We're powerless because we don't ask for power. He longs to give it, to recharge us, remake us, make us effective and beautiful, Christ-like people. And the power is available and we're not tapping into it.

And He's saying again, Wilt thou? Please say, yes.

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