

Episodes in Life of T/lord 02 the Impotent Man

by Robert Constable

Jesus recognizes the importance of the human will and waits on our readiness to be healed and changed, demonstrating his willingness and ability to help us become all we aspire to be.

Duration: 44:51

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 5:1-4, John 5:6, John 5:8

Topics: "Impotent"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the story of Jesus healing a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years. The preacher highlights four significant statements made by Jesus during this encounter. The first statement is a question, 'Wouldst thou be made whole?' The preacher emphasizes that Jesus is asking the man if he truly desires to be healed. The second statement is Jesus commanding the man to 'take up thy bed and walk,' indicating that he should not expect others to carry him but to use the strength given to him to live a new life. The preacher also mentions an epilogue to the story, where Jesus encounters the man again on a Sabbath day and brings about a significant change. The sermon encourages listeners to respond to Jesus' words and obey his voice in order to overcome the things that have mastered them.

Transcript

I know many a choir director would be as green as that lady's dress with envy if he could listen to that choir tonight. Wasn't that great? And it's just wonderful to see such a good crowd in this chapel this evening. This is really encouraging to Mr. Willie.

He just said to me, isn't this tremendous? And I say, amen, it certainly is. And we've come together to enjoy some episodes in the life of the Lord Jesus. These are simple things, things that you already could almost, you know, quote from memory.

But much of the ministry of the Word of God is bringing to our remembrance, things that are precious to us and things that we already know, isn't it? We trust that the Holy Spirit will do this for us in the way he sees is hopeful in these days. This evening I would like to make reference to an episode in the fifth chapter of the gospel of John, John chapter 5. You know, they say that all the parables of Jesus are miracles of wisdom, and all the miracles of Jesus are parables of teaching. This evening we're going to consider one of his miracles, and we'll think of it as a matter of teaching.

He was teaching something when he did this miracle, beginning with the first verse of John chapter 5. Mr. Willie, when is this meeting supposed to be over? After this, there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now, there is a Jerusalem by the sheep market, a pool which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water, for an angel went down at a certain season into the pool and troubled the water.

Whosoever then first, after the troubling of the water, stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. And a certain man was there which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie and knew that he had now been a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Will thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man when the water is troubled to put me into the pool.

But while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked.

And the seventh and the same day was the Sabbath. The Jews, therefore, said unto him that was cured, It is the Sabbath day. It is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.

He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk? And he that was healed wist not who it was. For Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place.

Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. Now, as I said this morning, in considering these various episodes in the life of the Lord Jesus, I want us, as much as possible, to enter into these episodes.

I want us to really live in the circumstances. Jesus is walking through the streets of Jerusalem. He has some of his disciples with him, no doubt.

They walk to the area of the city where Bethesda is, where there is a large porch with five sides like the pentagon building. And in this center of this five-sided porch is a pool, a pool of water. Not a deep pool, it's just a pool of water.

I'm not going to try and explain to you about the operation of this pool. We can just take what it says in the Bible to be the fact that an angel came down from time to time and troubled the water in the pool. And whoever got into the pool first, after the water was troubled, was made whole of whatever disease he had.

This must have been a very interesting thing, don't you think, that the people discovered this? But anyway, the people had found this out, that after the water was troubled, the first man in came out well. And so you can just believe that there was one mad scramble when the water was troubled. And not only was there a mad scramble then, but there was a multitude of folk who needed to be healed who came and took up residence on this porch.

Just like you see people the night before stand in line for the World Series. You know, everybody brought their newspapers to sleep on, and food to carry them over, and they just waited until the water was troubled. And there would be quite a lot of pushing and shoving to get into a good place, you know.

Some of them would just want to roll over into the water, and others would be a little farther away, and they'd be thinking all the time, now how am I going to get past that fella? He's blocking my way, and I'll

have to jump over him. But anyway, they were figuring out all kinds of ways to get into the water and get in fast. Well, one of the ways that some of them had found was to have a friend.

That's what this man meant, I'm sure, when he said, I have no man. Because some of them had a friend there that would just take hold of them and swish, and they'd go right into the water as fast as the water was troubled. That was the thing to do, believe me.

Well, there were lots of impotent people there, and Jesus came, and with him some of his disciples, and they were walking through the porch, and there were sick people here, and there were lame people there, and impotent people all around. And as he made his way through the porch, he stopped, and he began talking to this man. Now, I say he began to talk to this man because I think the story makes that clear.

It says that Jesus knew that he had been a long time in that condition, and on that porch. I don't think that Jesus just knew this intuitively, or because he knew all things. If that was the case, there was another circumstance under which you remember.

It's the episode in the ninth of Mark where he came down from a mountain. We'll refer to it a little later, and a father was there with his boy who was having fits, and the Lord said to the father, how long has he been in this condition? And the father said, ever since he was a little boy. Well, I think that's what happened here.

I think that Jesus, in coming through the porch, he saw this man lying there, and engaged him in some conversation, and said, how long have you been here? And he said, 38 years. You know, that's a long time, and it's longer even than you think it is when you're sick. And it's even longer than that when you're out on a porch waiting to be the first man in the pool.

38 years! The poem that I quoted to you this morning about this situation, I did not quote by mistake this morning, because the emphasis I had in mind was, it was a day like any other day. And this was true this morning when Jesus came by and spoke to Matthew. It's going to be true practically every episode we consider this week.

It came on a day that was like any other day, but you remember it went like this. It was a day like any other day, when by the pool the paralytic lay wasting in withering hope upon his bed, where half a lifetime he had lain half dead. 38 years, about half a lifetime isn't it? It was a Sabbath day without a name, when to the sheep gate the good shepherd came.

A step was heard, a voice, a sigh, a groan, and everything was changed from that day on. That was this circumstance. In the morning when this man woke up at the side of the pool, it was just another day, just like any other day.

Another day in which he and all the others were waiting for an angel to trouble the pool. And everybody went about his business in the morning, and was made real sure he didn't get too far away from the water, but just waited for the water to be troubled. A day like any other day.

Now there are several things about this episode that I want us to have in mind. The Jesus question when he met the man, the man's reaction to the question, and what followed the epilogue, if you will, of this story. Now there are four things that Jesus said that it seems to me are significant in this story.

One is, Wouldst thou be made whole? Another is, Arise, take up thy bed and walk. Another is, Thou art made whole. And the fourth is, Sin no more.

These are the four things that Jesus said that had significance. Now the first of these things, Wouldst thou be made whole? What do you think the answer to that question would be? After 38 years of lying on this porch, after having tried time and time again to get into the water, that's clear from what the man said, because he said, For while I am yet coming, another goes before me. So many times he had tried to get into the water, and just think the disappointment.

For 38 years? He'd never made it yet. He came there one day, and he probably thought maybe by evening the angel would trouble the water, and he'd get into it. I don't know how long he waited, but the water got troubled eventually, and he made for it.

But he was too late. And this had happened again, and again, and again, and again, for 38 years. And now a man comes onto the porch, stops and engages him in conversation, and says to him, Do you want to be better? You know, it's almost an infinite question, isn't it? What do you expect the man to say to a question like that? It's a simple question.

The important thing about the question is that it is a revelation of what the Lord Jesus thinks about the royalty of the human will. Jesus could do nothing for this man unless the man wanted it done. And so Jesus asked him if he wanted it done.

This is a very important thing for us to understand, that Jesus recognizes the importance of the human will. And before he will heal this man who has been 38 years in this condition, he wants the man to say that he wants to be made well first. The man can open the door to a miracle if he wants to, but he doesn't have to.

That's the way it has always been. Jesus offers to come into human life, and to do very wonderful things for individuals. But he won't butt in.

He won't burst his way in. He won't break down the doors of your will in order to do you good. No, you must want it.

You must be willing. And that's demonstrated wonderfully in this story, where Jesus asked a man who was 38 years among these impotent people if he wanted to be made well. Now, another thing that this question does that is a very interesting thing, it seems to me, it reveals the man's attitude.

What is his attitude? Well, his attitude is, why talk about it? Why ask me a question like that? I've been here for 38 years, and I haven't got anybody to put me in the pool. Every time I've tried to get into the water, somebody's gotten there ahead of me. And he has come to the point where he's completely hopeless.

He has come to the place where nothing can do him any good anymore. He doesn't expect to be the first man in the pool anymore. He's missed it too often.

And a man is in a bad way when he comes to this condition, when he thinks that even Jesus can't do anything for him, when he thinks he's so far gone that he loses his hope, and he never really expects to be made whole. And yet, and yet, wasn't this an interesting question? Do I want to be made better? This just opens the door just a crack, you know, just to let a little bit of light in. Is there a possibility here? Well,

there's enough possibility, so he did not give the Lord Jesus an impertinent answer.

He did not say, what a silly question this is to ask. No, he responded by explaining the situation and why he was so hopeless in it. At least he had a little inkling of hope, a renewal perhaps, because of the question.

Now the question was going to be, was he ready to do what Jesus said? Was he ready? He was almost hopeless. He'd been a long time sick. Was he ready? Now, in applying this story to our own circumstances in our own day here, and for it to have value to us, we must sense our need.

And we ought to be asking ourselves, do we want to be made whole, or didn't you think you were sick? You know, you don't have to be 38 years on the porch of Bethesda to need some help from the Lord Jesus. Have you failed in your own aspirations? Have you lived altogether up to the standard you set yourself, let alone the standard that the word of God has set for you? Have you? Are you completely satisfied that so far as your Christian experience is, you have been conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus? Are you satisfied with this? Or is there something in you that aspires to something more than you have yet experienced, something more than you have yet attained? Well, if there's any further for you to go in being conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus, then you're in the same sort of a situation that this man is in the story. You need help.

You can't conform yourself one iota to his image. And if you are to be changed any more, conformed any further to the image of Christ, to the will of God for you, to the accomplishment of all God intends to do in and through your life, if there is any more, then you are like this man at the pool of Bethesda. You have a need, and Jesus comes to meet that need.

Now, most people respond to this by saying, yes, I would like to be made whole too. I too recognize that there is a good deal of land still to be possessed. There is more to be accomplished in me than has been accomplished, and oh, I would to God it could be done.

Well, Campbell Morgan tells a story. He tells a story about a man that was in the district in which his church was, who had a very bad reputation as a drinker, and he was always in trouble, and his family was always in trouble because of his constant and continual drinking. And Campbell Morgan met him one day on the street, and said to him, when are you going to stop your drinking? And the man looked at Campbell Morgan, and he said, you're asking me when I'm going to stop my drinking? Don't you know that I have taken the cure so often they won't have me back in the place? Don't you know that I have tried and prayed and cried and done everything a human being can do to get over this habit, and you say to me, when am I going to stop my drinking? Campbell Morgan said, believe you me, I learned a lesson that day.

We were condemning this man for what he was, and he was simply in the grip of the devil, and he couldn't do a thing about it. He longed to be free of the thing we condemned him for, but he couldn't do anything about it. Campbell Morgan says, I learned not to be so hard on people after that.

Most people who wish they could know something of the freedom that life in Christ can bring, but I don't know how to get it. This man might have said to Jesus when he asked this question, what do you think? What do you think I'm lying here for? What do you think I'm on the porch for? He might have responded many ways, but he responded the way he did because there was a little hope there. His answer was, of course I want to be made whole, but I never will, I never shall be made whole, and this is why he was discouraged.

He had tried and tried, he had failed and he had failed again. Nobody could help him, but the question brings a gleam, a possibility. Now I want to spend a little bit of time talking about this business of can he and will he.

These are the questions that came into this man's mind when Jesus said to him, would thou be made whole? Naturally this man thought, who is he? Who does he think he is? What can he do? What would he do? So I want to scout this a little bit with you. Turn to that episode in Mark chapter 9. This is the story about the time the Lord Jesus came down the mountain, and his disciples were trying to cast out an evil spirit from a boy, and they were not able to do it. And then Jesus came, and it says in verse 14, when he came to his disciples he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them, and straightway all the people when they beheld him were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him.

And he asked the scribes, what question ye with them? And one of the multitude answered and said, Master I have brought unto thee my son which hath a dumb spirit, and wheresoever he taketh him he teareth him, and he foameth and gnashes with his teeth, and fineth away. And I speak to thy disciples that they should cast him out, and they could not. He answered him and said, O faceless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? Bring him unto me.

And they brought him unto him, and when he saw him straightway the spirit tear him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming. And he asked his father, how long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said to the child, and oft times it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters to destroy him. But if thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us.

And Jesus said unto him, if thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out and said with tears, Lord, I believe. Help thou mine unbelief.

When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him and enter no more into him. The spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him, and he was as one dead, insomuch that many said, he is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up, and he arose.

A wonderful story, isn't it? If thou canst do anything. Well, Jesus demonstrated he could all right. He could all right.

There's another little episode I want to refer you to in the 8th chapter of Matthew. Matthew chapter 8. And here we'll just read the first three verses. And when Jesus was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.

And behold, there came a leper and worshiped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand and touched him, saying, I will be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Wouldn't this be wonderful? Here's this man at the pool of Bethesda, and a man comes and says, do you want to be made better? And this man is not only able to make him better, but he's willing to make him better. Because Jesus is both willing and able. Not just for the man at the pool of Bethesda, but he is willing and he is able to help you in all or any of your need to become all you aspire to be, all the will of God purposes you to be.

Jesus is willing and able to do this for you tonight. But what about the question, do you want it? Well, this man said he wanted it. And because he was willing and able, the Lord Jesus began to work.

There is the royalty of the human will. God waits on our readiness. There's the revelation of need.

Sometimes that need amounts to hopelessness. There is a renewal of hope. Maybe somebody here tonight has got a renewal of hope.

You thought that maybe you'd come as far as you could come in the knowledge of the Lord. And maybe tonight you've got the idea there's a little more for you. And then there is one thing more.

There is the requirement of submission. Oh my, how many fall off the bus at this point? The requirement of submission, the response to the word of the Lord, the move from the realm of the mind to the realm of action. It's one thing to say we want help.

It's one thing to recognize our need. It's one thing even to acknowledge his ability to meet our need. It is quite another thing to submit to his word, to do what he says to do.

And Jesus said, arise, take up thy bed and walk. Arise. I can just imagine that one of his disciples sort of tapped the Lord on the shoulder and said to him, but Lord, that's what he can't do.

If he could rise, he could have got in the pool by himself. He wouldn't need a man to help him. Lord, he can't get up.

What's the use of telling the man to get up? And while the disciple is reminding the Lord of this, the man got up. You see, the man obeyed. He didn't ask her questions.

He didn't say what kind of double talk is this? I've been lying here for 38 years. If I could have got up, I'd have gotten up 37 and a half years ago. No, the man didn't argue with the Lord.

Do you argue with the Lord? When the Lord wants to do something for you, do you argue about it? You won't get anything if you argue with him about it. The Lord Jesus just told him to do something. And if he would do it, that's all that was necessary.

This man did it. He couldn't arise, of course, but he did, because Jesus said so. Rise.

You know, this is what Jesus is doing all the time. We'll find this in some of the other episodes that we consider together. Jesus is always making it necessary for men to face what is impossible in their lives.

We like to avoid the impossible, generally speaking. We think we have decided what things are possible and what things aren't possible. This man had it all figured out what was possible and what was impossible, and we've got it all figured out what's possible for the Lord to do in and through us and for us.

And so, the Lord works according to the limitation that we put on him. But the Lord brings us all the time right up against the impossible thing in our lives. Remember, there was a rich young ruler that came to see him, the rich young ruler, rich young ruler.

Man, a rich young ruler's got it made, hasn't he? He's loaded. He has everything when it comes to material goods. And this one was very rich, the word of God tells us.

He was young. You know, they say the only trouble with youth is that it's wasted on young people. But he had it.

He was young, and he was a ruler. He was a man of influence and power. Had it made, didn't he? But he came to the Lord Jesus and said, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Looking at the Lord Jesus, he realized that although the Lord Jesus had no material things, he had nothing.

Although the Lord Jesus had no influence, no position, no power, Jesus seemed really to live. And he thought, boy, I wish I knew what it was to live like he lives. And he came to the Lord Jesus.

And you know what Jesus told him? You remember, Jesus said, get rid of all the things that are bugging you these days and come and follow me. Because being rich isn't all easy, you know. It isn't all soft.

Talk to the rich and find out the burdens that are put upon them. Influence costs something. Power exacts a toll.

And men of influence and men of power and men of wealth are burdened men. And Jesus said to this one, get rid of these things. Bring your life under control.

Bring it to me and live. Well, he couldn't do that. Jesus brought him right up to the impossible thing in his life.

This young man could have done anything else. He told the Lord, he obeyed the law. He told the Lord he'd done everything that was required.

He had the money to do anything else. He had the power to do anything else, except the thing the Lord asked him to do. And so the Lord is always doing this.

He does that to you tonight. He brings you face to face with the one thing that's been impossible for you all your life. The thing that keeps you from being Christ-like.

Now, I worked with a very wonderful Christian woman for years at Moody Bible Institute. She was Irish. And the impossibility in her life was getting rid of the fact she was Irish.

And this is quite an impossibility. It was for her. She would blow her court, you know, at almost anything.

And then all the time when she simmered down afterwards, she said, well, you've got to remember I'm Irish. Well, everybody knew very well she was Irish. But this was the impossible thing in her life was to get over being Irish.

We all have something like that, that stands in the way of our being all we ought to be. And Jesus says, let's face that thing. Now, notice this.

He said first, wilt thou be made whole? What about your will? And then he said, arise. And in saying arise, he demonstrated that he was willing. He was willing.

The man's will and the will of the Lord Jesus now came together. And what happened? The man got up. The man rose and took up his bed and woke.

Jesus supplies the power. Now he stands. This man stands not in the energy of his will.

This fellow hadn't read *The Power of Positive Thinking*. He didn't know about this business, that you can do anything if you will to do it hard enough. Happily, he didn't have to have read those books.

All he did was obey the Lord Jesus. And he had all the power it needed. He was not standing in the energy of his will.

He was standing in the energy of the power that Christ gives. What a difference. What a difference.

And Jesus said, take up thy bed. I wonder why he said that. Do you know why he said that? Take up thy bed? Well, what's that got to do with it? Oh, it had a great deal to do with it.

Now, I've told you about this porch with all these impotent people about. Many of them. And this is certainly true, that every time there was a moving about among those people, everybody moved his palate a little closer to the water, didn't he? Wouldn't you? Ah, yes.

Get as close to the water as you can. But when Jesus said to this man, pick up your bed, he gave up his place. Somebody else slid right in.

After 38 years, he must have been pretty close, don't you think? But when Jesus said, pick up your bed, he gave up his place. He burned his bridges behind him. There was no way back.

He'd have to get at the end of the line again. And what did the man do? He stood up, and he picked up his bed. He knew that standing, he would never have to lie there again.

He gave up his place. He burned his bridges behind him. And away he went.

He walked. What does that mean to us, that he carried his bed away? It means that he carried the thing that carried him. And this is the wonderful thing of having a personal confrontation with the Lord Jesus.

You can carry the thing that carried you. You can master the thing that masters you. What keeps you from the completion of the Lord's work in your life, in conforming you to the image of the Lord Jesus? What keeps you from it? Something's keeping you from it.

This story guarantees to us that we can master the thing that has mastered us, if we will respond to the word of the Lord Jesus, and do as he says, and obey his voice. And then it says, take up thy bed and walk. Doesn't seem very much, does it? Just two words, and walk.

But you know, a lot of people expect you to carry. A lot of people think that, well, okay, so the Lord made things better for me. Everybody ought to remember, I'm not very strong.

I've been 38 years lying on my back. Well, the Lord says, don't expect other people to carry you. Go ahead in the strength I've given.

Go on the new things. To a glad new life. All right, that's the story.

But there's an epilogue to this. There's a little story added to this story. And it's a wonderful little addition.

Afterward, it says, in the last verse here that we read, afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, behold, thou art made whole. Well, I see you're better, he said in our term. Sin no more, lest the worst thing come unto thee.

Has he said that to you? In your meeting with the Lord Jesus from day to day, and from time to time, has he reminded you that he has made you whole, and that you stand not in your own strength, but in his power? Has he reminded you of this? We need reminding of this, because so frequently we act like the rest of the world acts. You know, we're not just human. So often we take refuge in this silly little phrase, after all, I'm just human.

Anybody who has met Jesus Christ and has been indwelt by the spirit of the living God is not just human. And Jesus reminds us of that. And don't rest, please don't rest until Jesus reminds you of that again, that all you aspire to is possible in his strength.

Sin no more. Well, this is quite an order, isn't it? Sin no more. Now you're afraid I'm going to talk about sinless perfection, aren't you? I know you all too well for that.

No, but I'm talking about this. You don't need to sin. I don't need to sin.

We have been provided with the strength that would keep us from sinning, if we would appropriate that strength, if we would appropriate that power. Dr. Culbertson, the president of the Moody Bible Institute, has written a very wonderful book, which if you have not read, you should read, and that is God's Provision for Holy Living. God has provided for it.

If we are not living a holy life, it's not his fault. He's given the power. We have failed to appropriate it.

So, my message tonight is this. Arise, make a beginning again tonight. Stand in his strength.

Face the impossible thing in your life. Not that you'll do great things, but he will. Shall we pray? Gracious Lord, our God, we thank thee.

We thank thee for the Lord Jesus, who made thee known, who revealed thy heart to men, who has said to us in this evening hour something about thy will to do us good, thy desire to bring us on increasingly in the accomplishment of thy gracious purpose in our lives, something about thy ability to conform us more perfectly to the image of the Lord Jesus, to help us be all we ought to be for his sake. Oh, help us in our response, we pray. Help us to be like this man on Bethesda's porch, to respond with obedience to whatever thou dost say to us as we face the thing that keeps us from thy best.

Help us, we pray, in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

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