

COME AND SEE

Encounters with Jesus in the Gospel of John

PART FIVE

**WHAT KIND OF SOLUTION
DOES JESUS OFFER?**



COME AND SEE

Encounters with Jesus in the Gospel of John

What Kind of Solution Does Jesus Offer?

By David Fields

“All that we call human history – money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery – is the long terrible story of man [sic] trying to find something other than God which will make him happy.” — C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

I. The Problem Runs Deeper Than We Imagine

“Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” – John 5:14

Does Jesus mean that his illness is a direct result of a particular sin? And then we wonder: could that be true for me too?

Tragic situations, illness, are not *necessarily* linked to a particular sin (See John 9; Luke 13). But some are.

In 1 Corinthians 11:30, Paul says that some people in the Corinthian church were sick because of the way that they have continued to separate the body of Christ by not recognizing the needs of the poor in their midst. They are physically sick because of a sin issue.

In Acts 5, Ananias and Saphira, a husband and wife, both are struck dead because they lied to Peter, and ultimately to the Holy Spirit concerning a business deal. So, we see specific times when there is a specific ailment or consequence linked to a specific sin.

Was this man’s ailment a direct result of a specific sin? We aren’t told for sure, but it seems very likely.

This should not send us searching for how a specific issue is linked to a specific sin. Jesus’ words in Luke 13 tell us that. See, the pain, the sickness, the tragic situations we see or experience ourselves, they should always lead one direction – to turn away from self-centered living, from sin, and turn to God’s grace; and live out of that, live for him.

In Jewish and Christian thought, all the brokenness, the illness, death itself, all the pain we experience in the world is ultimately as a result of sin – maybe not a specific one as may be the case for this man – but to the deadly effects of our fallen nature. And this is exactly what Jesus has come to repair.

“Stop sinning or something worse will happen to you.” – John 5:14

What's worse? Being outside of the life God gives. That's worse. Being separated from God for all eternity is worse: by far.

"Do not be amazed at this [at what he says about his own nature as being in union with God the Father], for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned." – John 5:28-29

II. The Solution is Not What We Often Think

This pool, a sort of 'magical' solution. This man seemed to hold the superstitious belief that the first person who gets into this pool after the waters had been disturbed would be miraculously healed.

How might we go searching for solutions?

1. The self-created "spiritual" approach. This approach says: "I want to do my own spirituality, 'follow my own truth,' on my own terms. Maybe mix and match from bits and parts of religions to form my own 'spirituality.'" There has been a legitimate resurgence of neo-paganism; people buy crystals, read horoscopes, and not just as a joke.

2. The "wellness" approach. It is good to care for our God-given bodies. There is aiming to be healthy, to steward our bodies well, and there is an approach to health that borders on cult-like devotion. "If you just buy this drink...this new diet...that new pill...make sure you get rid of all stress in your life...you can be as happy, skinny, clear-skinned as me..."

3. The technological approach. This can come out in looking to technologies as a means of gaining control over the world, over our lives, to get what we really want. We often approach tech as a 'magic' solution.

4. The prosperity 'gospel' approach. It's also possible to try and sneak in a magical solution within the trappings of Christianity itself. For example, what is often called "the prosperity gospel" teaches something along the lines that for those who have enough of the right kind of faith, God's plan is to make you happy, healthy, and even wealthy. This false view ends up treating God as if he were he were a form magic formula to get what we want.

Superstitions, like we see in the man at the pool, are false beliefs about God, about the world, and about how we can gain 'power' to enact the sort of solutions we want.

This encounter with this man who was lame is paired with another sickness – one that is much harder to detect, and often, much more dangerous.

5. The systems of religious control approach. This text begins with the man at the pool, but quickly turns into a conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. This text reveals a deep spiritual sickness that puts these leaders in a very dangerous position. They are missing the very presence of God, blinded by their theological approach, and supposed commitment to the Scriptures. But Jesus says to them:

"You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

– John 5:39-40

"Every believer is susceptible to it [to a rigorous commitment to Scripture, to "truthfulness", but not a life-giving connection to Jesus]....There are specialists who can cite Scripture and verse, who can identify the religious speck in someone's eye from a great distance, but in whom love for God does not exist." – Gary Burge

III. The Solution Is Better Than We Ever Hoped

The first man is lost and broken on the physical plane – and morally has missed the mark in some ways.

These religious leaders, on the other hand, are lost and broken because of their attempts to be very, very good – to do everything right, and control those they believed to be wrong. Both are desperately broken. Both are wrong. Both need the solution.

The solution is not in magic. The solution is not in a system, nor even the Scriptures.

IV. The Solution Invites Us to Respond

“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?” – John 5:6

This tells us something key about the character of Jesus, and the way he goes about changing us.

Like the man in this story, we too are ultimately unable to ‘save ourselves’, to fix our real issue – for it runs so deep. And, I think, Jesus treats us the same way. He dignifies us with this same kind of choice: “Do you want to get well?”

Jesus is able to heal at all levels:

“Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.” – John 5:8

His voice comes to us as well – to invite us to find life, real life, starting right now:

“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. 25 Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.” – John 5:24

The time has *now* come to hear the voice of the Son of God and live. This “now” is still now. It’s today. Right now. *“Has crossed over from death to life.”* Not just “will”...but has.

“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29 and come out—...” – John 5:28-29a

Some to eternal life, others to condemnation.

And Jesus means this literally. He will bring with him a renewal of his good world – a new heavens and new earth is how the Bible speaks of this. It’s a physical reality that will come when he returns.

Start Walking

These words tell us something too: that we need to enact our trust in Jesus in how we walk. It’s like Jesus is pointing to the man’s physical condition: “See, you are well again,” like, you can walk physically. “Stop sinning...”, like, “now start walking out what your new life means.”

Like it was for this man whose legs worked for the first time in 38 years, we’ll need to begin exercising those muscles that we didn’t know we had. Muscles that help us stand and do the right things in our homes, in our workplaces, that help us carry forward the hope that we have been given. Give us strength to bear the burdens of others.

A Prayer of Blessing

Jesus, bless our feet, may they bring good news.
 Bless our legs, may they carry on in times of suffering.
 Bless our backs, may they be strong enough to bear the burdens of others.
 Bless our arms to hold the lonely, and our hands to do good work.
 Bless our ears to discern truth, our eyes to see beauty, and our mouths to speak encouragement.
 Bless our minds, may we grow wise.
 And finally, bless our hearts, may they grow to love you – and all that you have made – in their right order. Amen. (Adapted from *Habits of the Household*)



DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

Open Up

Some people tend to be fixers – often rushing to find solutions. How would the people around you describe your approach to problems? Why?

Dig In

1. Read John 5:1-16. What were this man's greatest problems?
2. How does Jesus go about addressing them?
3. In your view, what are some of the biggest "problems" that we face as humans? What about in your own life?
4. What sort of solutions do we, as humans, often run to (See also John 5:39-40)?
5. How is Jesus ultimately addressing these? In what areas of your life might Jesus be saying: "Do you want to get well?" What would it look like for you to open your life to him – to respond to his offer of life (see John 5:24)?

Prayer

Take some time to give thanks to God that his solution to our greatest needs is to offer us himself – his very life. Bring those things you spoke of in your conversation to Jesus in prayer. Pray also for the needs of our community – people who need to find that Jesus is the ultimate Healer.