

INTRODUCTION

Most of us like new stuff like new car, new house, new clothes, etc. But sometimes it may be challenging to learn to use new things. Therefore, old stuff has its own appeal. Just last week a recycler hauled away my old washer. To say it is “old” is an overstatement, because I have only used it for a little more than two years! Even that guy commented that the washer still looked brand-new. What was broken was the electronic circuit board. But in order to pay the price to replace the part I may as well buy a new machine. I told him that all I wanted was a machine with a motor, a drum and some buttons like the one I had used for over 13 years, not to mention that I inherited it from someone. There needs to be a paradigm shift when we transition from old to new. In John 5, through healing a paralyzed man, Jesus challenged the people with a new way of thinking. God often works in our lives through unexpected ways at unpredictable times. There are three groups of people in the story – the group of patients, the paralyzed man and the Jews. In the four gospels when we come across “the Jews” more than likely it refers to the opponents of Jesus, especially the religious leaders of that time. Let us study each of the three groups of people.

EXPLANATION

1. 被運氣蒙蔽 Blinded by Luck

The first group of people in the story are the patients. I would describe them as being blinded by luck. John indicated their conditions in **verse 3**: Here a great number of disabled people used to lie - the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. Needless to say, the medical technology in the first century was far inferior to nowadays. Some treatable diseases today may be incurable in Jesus' time. Why did those patients gathered around the pool? There is a **verse 4** in your Bible in fine-prints or in the footnote that reads: From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease he had. The location of this verse denotes that the verse could not be found in some Bible manuscripts. It might be added to explain why the water in the pool was troubled from time to time. It could only be a superstition. No one might actually saw an angel stirring the water, and we are not told whether or not the first patient who dived into the water when the water was agitated was really healed of his disease. Those patients were blinded by luck. They might think that there was no other alternative anyway. Why not give it a try? They had no idea when the water would move. Therefore, perhaps day after day and from dawn to dusk they sat by the pool just to wait for their luck. They believed that somehow there was an unseen force that could change their fate. Isn't that the same reason why some people believe in the zodiac or rely on fortune-telling? The mentality is that if you do not try it then how can you conclude that it is not accurate? Also, if for some reason it actually works and you do not follow it, then you will not get what you want. It may be wealth, health, a new job or a future spouse. Dear friends: are you a person like that? You may not read the horoscope but you believe that your life is controlled by something called fate. The Bible tells us that God is the sovereign Lord of the universe and He is the Lord of our lives. God is not a random and uncontrollable force. Lord

Jesus came to the earth to show us that He is a wise, rational and compassionate God. Only Jesus can break you from your blindness over luck.

2. 被教條約束 Bound by Dogmas

In our discussion we will skip the paralyzed man and look at the Jews first. Those religious leaders were a group of people who were bound by their dogmas. Jesus healed the paralytic. But instead of sharing his joy the Jews were mad. **Verse 10** reads: and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.” They confronted the man for violating their law. But what did the law actually say? **Exodus 20:8-10** tell us: 8 “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work...” God set up the Sabbath to give people a day of rest from work and to worship Him. But the religious leaders in Jesus’ time cared more about what people should not do rather than what they should do. Worse still, they liked to play the role of civic police. Therefore, when they saw the man carrying his mat they wanted to know who authorized him to do so. As they learned that it was Jesus who gave the man permission they escalated their persecution toward Jesus. So much so that John tells us in **verse 18**: For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. These religious leaders condemned Jesus for breaking their law because Jesus violated the Sabbath and He claimed Himself to be equal to God. The Jews were bound by their own dogmas, such that anything that did not fit into their way of thinking was rejected. Dear friends: are you a person like that? For example, do you find that salvation by God’s grace through faith hard to believe? You are bound by the dogmas in the traditional Chinese belief system that one has to earn a better outcome in the so-called next life by doing good work. But if salvation is gained through our good deeds then one can easily take pride in himself. Another problem with the work-salvation mentality is with the motive. The reason why I help people or donate to the charity is to accumulate my brownie points. Deep down inside I may not have a sincere heart to care for others. Jesus came to break us from our dogmas. He freely bestows saving grace to all who accept Him by faith.

3. 被藉口攔阻 Blocked by Excuses

Now we come to the main character of the story. While the other patients were blinded by luck and the Jews were bound by dogmas, this paralytic was blocked by excuses. In **verse 6** Jesus asked this patient an interesting question: ...“Do you want to get well?” What kind of question was that? If the man did not want to get well he would not have asked people to carry him to the pool. What Jesus was inquiring was not about his desire, it was about his will. How did he respond Jesus’ question? Let us look at **verse 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.” He blamed the environment for not cooperating. He was blocked by his own excuses. Assuming the pool looks like an ordinary swimming pool, he could have crawled his way into the water. Another possible conclusion was that after 38 years he might have gotten used to his condition. Nowadays there are quite some people in U.S. who live on social welfare. Some of them may think that if the government can take care of them, then why bother to go look for a job? How did Jesus help overcome the excuses this patient had? Jesus tackled the

problem source. We know the result in **verse 8-9**: 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. He reacted positively to Jesus’ order and “at once” he was healed. Can you imagine how his leg muscles might be like after not walking in 38 years? He did not need any warm-up or try-out. It was a miracle! Jesus went to this patient when he was helpless. You may have a healthy body, but the Bible tells us that we all have a common spiritual illness calls sin. Sin prevents us from approaching the holy God. Jesus came 2,000 years ago to pave the path to salvation for us. Paul tells us in **Ephesians 2:4-5** that: 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved. When we are still indulging in sin, lacking of interest about spiritual things and ignorant about Jesus, God accomplished His salvation plan for us through the death of Jesus on the cross. Dear friends: what sort of excuses are blocking you from receiving God’s grace? You may blame yourself that you are not smarter, richer or more capable than others. Some people may say: “I’m too busy now. Perhaps I will go to the church after I retire.” Other may think: “This Christianity thing requires me to change my lifestyle and my career plan.” Today, Jesus is asking you the same question: “Do you want to get well?” Do you admit that you are helpless in your sin? Only Jesus can provide the solution for you. Put your trust in Him.

CONCLUSION

God often works in our lives through unexpected ways at unpredictable times. After our study can you spot something unusual in the story? Why did Jesus choose to heal the paralytic? There were many other patients by the pool. Some of them might be in a more desperate situation than that man. Why didn’t Jesus heal any other patient? Also, unlike other miracle healings in the gospel the man did not ask Jesus for help. We cannot see any hint of his faith in the healing power of Jesus either. After he got well he did not express any gratitude to Jesus. Quite the contrary, to protect himself he told the Jews that it was Jesus who healed him. That deepened the controversy between the Jews and Jesus, and eventually led to the sentencing of Jesus to death on the cross. Jesus took all the trouble just to heal one person. That is how God’s grace works. You see, God often works in our lives through unexpected ways at unpredictable times. You may be struggling with your problems like the many patients waiting by the pool. You may be stuck in your own thinking like the Jews. You may have given up on hope like the paralytic. Even today, Jesus is saying to you: “My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working.” Entrust your problem to Jesus, for He is our help.