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## The Tragedy of Missed Potential

### John 5:10-16

**Intro:** In our verse by verse study of **ch5**, we stopped at **vs9** where John makes a point of telling us that Jesus had the nerve to perform a miraculous healing on the lame man beside the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath day. We took some time to look at the history and purpose of the Sabbath day observance and learned that it was for the Jews only and that as NT believers; we are now free from the demands of the Law. We also looked into the history and purpose of worshipping on Sunday, the Lord's Day and that we do this not according to the traditions of men but in fact, because it is God's pattern of worship as revealed in some important spiritual events recorded in Acts. We also learned through God's pattern revealed in the NT, believers are to celebrate the Lord's Day with rejoicing, with activity (kingdom advancing) and with a spiritual expectation that the Lord will honor and bless our worship that is offered to Him faithfully and obediently. Anything less is lax disobedience, anything more is crass legalism.

As we turn our attention back to the verse by verse study, we are going to take note of 3 different groups of people who come into contact with Jesus Christ and thus have the distinct opportunity to not only realize their full potential in Christ but by virtue of their relationship with Jesus, could very well capitalize on that potential for His ultimate glory.

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**10-** the Jews- The 1<sup>st</sup> group we see is the religious leadership in Jerusalem, the Jews is how John frequently refers to them. In this case, they were probably mostly Pharisees. We must understand that these leaders were not more blind or stubborn than anyone else, they simply represent established religion. They were part of a special society that had grown comfortable in their position (and wealthy) and were merely trying to maintain the status quo. Anything that came along and tried to upset their profitable apple cart was a cause of suspicion and great concern.

They immediately begin to question the healed man. They remind the man that it was the Sabbath and as such, it was illegal for him to pick up his bed, let alone carry it around. Of course, it wasn't a violation of the Mosaic Law but it was a violation of the traditional rabbinical interpretation of the

commandment against doing work on the Sabbath. Through out its history, Israel had failed to keep the Sabbath day holy and had failed miserably. Thus, they were warned against it by Jeremiah, suffered invasion and captivity partially because of it and still, after they returned to the land, they had a propensity to secularize the day and use it for normal work and commerce until Nehemiah put a stop to it. The Sabbath was not just another business day in Israel; it was God's day and was to be kept free of worldly pursuits. So, the regulations against working began as a praiseworthy attempt to preserve the holiness of the day but in time, they became so burdensome and absurd that the real meaning of the day was lost in its observance.

There's something very odd about the response of the Jews in vs10. I don't know about you, but its not every day in my life that I get to see a man who's been lame for 38 yrs just get up and walk. Was this old hat for the Pharisees? Was this old hat for the Pharisees? Was this so common place that it didn't catch their attention? I doubt it. The man was hanging out by the pool for 38 yrs, if this were a common occurrence, why'd it take so long to get to him? No, this was a rare occurrence; in fact, nothing like this ever happened until Jesus showed up on the scene. And yet, in spite of the rarity of this event, the religious leaders did not see a miracle, they only saw a violation!

How is this possible? How could they be so blind? I believe there are 2 things that directly contributed to the Jews lack of perception in this matter.

- 1) Legalism – I mentioned a few weeks ago that legalism blinds us to real needs; it hardens those who practice it in their relationship to others. Everything is secondary to keeping the Law, no matter who gets hurt or how much. But it's actually worse than that. Remember, I also mentioned that the basic principles of this world deny the grace and power of God? Well, legalism takes this a step further. Of course, religious people would never deny the grace and power of God but legalism, by its very nature, negates the scope of God's grace and denies the reach of God's power. These Jews are confronted by an amazing miracle but all they can deduce is that it must not be from God because he's carrying his bed on the Sabbath. Their priorities are clearly skewed.

- 2) Superstition – another problem these leaders had was an unbiblical concept of the power of God. It's obvious that they believed that God's

power could be accessed and wielded independent of God's person. This was the belief of the common folks. Why else would they sit around a pool and wait for an "angel" to stir the water? When has God's power ever been randomly exercised through an inanimate object? Moses' rod didn't act of its own accord. The plagues in Egypt didn't just happen. There is always a representative of God present when God's power is revealed. Its one thing for the common people to hold such foolish beliefs but the religious leaders should have known better. They were the teachers of Israel but it's clear that they still needed to be taught. How could it be possible for someone to wield the power of God to heal but yet, in their minds, break the Law of God in that healing? They seem to have a place for a magical healing pool in their theology as long as it didn't happen on the Sabbath!

These religious leaders weren't blind to the reality of who Jesus was simply because they were thick-headed. No, they couldn't see who Jesus truly was because they didn't want to see it. **Jer 5:31** gives commentary on this self-imposed blindness. But can you imagine what would have happened in Israel if they had opened their eyes to the truth and received Jesus for who He is? Can you imagine the revival that would have swept through that region? Look at the diversity of the crowds John the Baptist preached to: common folk, tax collectors, soldiers, even the religious crowd. Multitudes also followed Jesus for a time – imagine the outcome if the religious establishment had gotten on board and finally shown the nation what it was to submit to the Lord and walk in His grace. Of course, all we can do is imagine. They chose to persist in their legalism, superstition and blindness to the truth.

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**11-15-** the man- He knew his goose was cooked. I mean, c'mon! My first time walking in 38 yrs and I get jacked up by 5-0! They had him dead to rights – caught him red handed (or flat-footed) but he did have one ace up his sleeve and he played it right away. He could have tried saying, "It's not my stuff man; I'm just carrying it for a friend." Had he done that, he'd probably been the first to use that lame excuse but certainly not the last. No, his defense against the charge of Sabbath-breaking was that he was acting by the command of another. "The man that healed me told me to do it." In fact, lifting his bed was actually one of the conditions for his cure (vs8). To his credit, in his response, there seems to be the logical implication that the one who was able to perform such a powerful miracle must also have a certain amount of authority and obedience to that person's command

seemed like an obvious responsibility to him.

Now, his defense didn't necessarily exonerate him in the eyes of the Jews but it did serve to take the heat off of him and put it squarely on the One who had healed him. The Jews pounced on this new development because it was one thing to break the law but an ever greater thing to tell someone else to break the law. They're very interested in finding out who the real culprit was. "Just give us a name and we'll cut you loose." What relief he may have felt was now slipping away – "I don't know who He was. I didn't check His ID or anything. I didn't get the license plate of the guy who healed me!" Despite his lack of information, the Jews cut him loose anyway – they had bigger fish to fry.

Later, Jesus found him in the temple. This is pretty astounding given the amount of people who would have been in Jerusalem in general and the temple in particular. But it shouldn't really surprise us because Jesus always finds the people He's looking for. This second meeting was no more a chance encounter than their first meeting. The Lord's initial response points back to that first meeting: See, you have been made well..." which is exactly what Jesus had asked him at their first encounter by the pool (vs6). But then Jesus goes on to say something confusing: Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." Is Jesus saying that the man's previous ailment was caused by a specific sin?

I don't think so. Later in ch9, Jesus will shoot down the notion that a man was born blind because of sin. Let's be clear, sin has its consequences, which means in a general way, all sickness, physical ailments and deformities have their origin in sin but that's not to say a specific sin will cause a specific ailment. The key to understanding this 2nd statement of Jesus is to understand His 1<sup>st</sup> statement. Again, the Geek word translated made is ginomai: to become

It expresses the creative work of God both in the physical world and in the spiritual. Jesus not only healed the man's legs but He also revealed the divine power, grace and compassion of the Father in His own personage to him. The only question now is: will the man choose to see it? His legs work now but do his eyes?

In light of this, what sin is Jesus referring to? If both the common folk and the religious leaders believe that God's power can be used independently of

God Himself, then the sin Jesus is concerned with is the unwillingness to believe that Jesus is the One in whom the Father is revealed and through whom God's power works. In several other passages in John, sin is defined as not believing in Jesus (8:24; 15:24; 16:9). So, the command to stop sinning is merely an admonition against unbelief! That kinda makes a lot more sense because what could be worse than 38 yrs as a lame man? How about an eternity separated from God. That would be a lot worse and that's exactly what rebellious unbelief will bring you to. Jesus is not concerned that he will fall sick again; He's concerned he will die in his sin not realizing the power of God to forgive sin and bring salvation thru the death and resurrection of His Son.

It's difficult to know if the man believed who Jesus was. Apparently, he thought the only way he could ever truly be off the hook with the Jews was to go and rat Jesus out to them. From my perspective, this is unconscionable! How could he do this? What could the Jews hope to take from him that was greater than what Jesus had already given him? As unbelievable as it may seem, in the history of God's dealing with humanity, there's been more than one person who has gratefully accepted the gift and then turned around and completely ignored the Giver! In fact, it's more a common occurrence than it should be.

But think of the impact this man could have had in Jerusalem had he obeyed Jesus and believed on Him with his whole heart. He could have gone back and introduced all his old pool side partners to Jesus! They all might not have wanted to hear about Him but at least they were a captive audience. I mean, they weren't going anywhere. Think of the testimony he would've had with his own family, friends and neighbors. They could have ignored his message but they couldn't have ignored his healing! Sadly, this didn't seem to be the case. Here is a man who personally experienced the presence and the power of God on his life in the person of Jesus Christ and it appears that he was content to just get up and go about his business. The extent of his missed potential is nothing less than a tragedy!

**16-** the Jews- In the end, the religious leaders didn't prosecute the man who was healed, even though he had broken the law. But, they did begin to persecute Jesus Christ. This persecution didn't relax until it met its desired end: death. They callously ignored the good deeds that Jesus performed for the helpless and hopeless and concentrated all their efforts on destroying

Him.

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I originally said there were 3 groups to look at in this passage but the 3<sup>rd</sup> group is not found in these verses, it's the group reading them, its God's people today. We are free from the law so we're not duty bound to any form of religious legalism. We have the complete and clear Word of God and we possess centuries of scholarly work that rightly divides the Word. We are no longer bound by an ignorance in which superstition and false doctrine can thrive. We have been made well – made new creations by the power of Jesus' death and resurrection and the work of His Holy Spirit. We have all the advantages these other groups had and more but are we living up to our true potential?

What is our true potential? What does the Word say? The Bible has a lot to say about the children of God but let's just look at 1 verse - **1 Peter 2:9**. We could spend a lot of time on the nouns but just look at the adjectives – chosen, royal, holy, special, marvelous! Chosen – God wasn't forced to take you, He chose you before you ever decided to choose Him! Royal - think Prince William or Prince Harry are something? That's just earthly royalty. You're part of the royal line of heaven, a citizen of a coming kingdom that can't be shaken; a child of a King higher than all other kings. There's no game when it comes to His throne. He will reign forever and ever and you'll reign with Him. Holy – set apart, by God and for God. Who else can say that? Special – because you belong to God. A museum may contain a lot of ordinary items: hats, canes, shoes, etc. Their only real significance is that they used to belong to someone important. God takes ordinary people and because He works in them; they become special.

Why does God do this? So that you may proclaim His praises! How could you not! As Christians, we are burdened by glorious purpose. The privilege attached to our status as followers of Christ is that we get to represent God! That's what it means to be an ambassador. We are royal representatives of the crown. And not only that but we've also been deputized by the King to offer pardons and full-fledged citizenship to anyone and everyone who will receive it!

Your potential is unlimited. God desires to accomplish through your life exceedingly abundantly above what you could ever ask for or even think of. It doesn't matter your age or your experience – you haven't even scratched

the surface of all God intends for your life. There's a lot more to be accomplished and it will be all to the glory of God! Are we ready to live up to our full potential in Christ?

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If I'm such a spiritual super hero, if I'm part of a royal family that will reign through all eternity, why do I still have to take out the garbage or why must I drag my tired carcass to work every day? As special as we are in Christ, our lives are still made up of minutes and seconds that don't seem all that special. So, how do we live out an extraordinary calling while doing ordinary things and living in a world that's completely messed up?

This is why we need to have our eyes opened! Living out the divine calling on your life doesn't necessarily mean doing entirely new things; it may simply mean doing ordinary things in an entirely new way. We have to see our lives from the heavenly perspective. Our priorities must become the priorities of our King. This is certainly something we can do because we have been called...out of the darkness into His marvelous light. Let us walk in that light! 😊