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*The God Who Heals:
When He Wants*
John 5: 16-30

As you get to know me well, you'll discover that I can be a goofy guy and I'm fairly laid back. Since I became an adult this has manifested in my choice of clothes. I wound up wearing whatever was convenient... or whatever was amusing to me. My wardrobe has a natural life-cycle of about ten years, which meant that when I met Megan at 25 I was still wearing clothes from my teenage years. And along the way I'd picked up a few gems from thrift stores and whatnot. For example, there's this amazing polyester outfit that I only found out this year would make a good Halloween costume. There are these awesome slacks that are about 10 sizes too large for me. I embarrassed Megan by showing up to a bowling alley with these on. And these jeans are a source of pride and joy for me. You'll note their aerodynamic features, very breathable, excellent summer wear.

Now, I was fairly content with the clothes that I had, but I'm grateful for my wife because she was painfully aware of a hard truth: my wardrobe was in desperate need of new life. The clothes I so loved were ill-fitting, weird, or just plain ugly. And as blissfully nonchalant as I was about this, Megan served me well by breathing new life into my wardrobe.

Many of us have areas of our life where we are in need of new life, in much more serious ways than a simple wardrobe refresh. Some of us are in desperate need of new life. Of course this is true, it's why this series on healing has been so powerful, because we all need new life actually. There's not a one of us who has not been touched by the decay of death in some way. Maybe you need new life in your marriage. Maybe you need new life in your body in some way. Maybe you need new life in your mind. But we all need new life.

Today we continue our series on healing from John 5 and this is exactly where Jesus takes us. You will remember from Pastor Mark's sermon that Jesus had just healed a man in the temple. You'll remember that Jesus tip-toed through the crowd of broken people and grabbed this one whiny, paralyzed, undeserving man to show us that God will heal whomever he wants. But if you'll remember, one of the things that Pastor Mark pointed out was that this healing was a provocation by Jesus. He picked a guy who would go and blab to the rulers about what Jesus had done, that he had healed on the Sabbath which was forbidden by Jewish law, and ultimately be set up to be crucified on the cross because of this and more. But in

the meantime, this healing provides Jesus a kind of springboard to talk about himself. And as we pick up in John 5:16, listen to what he says about himself.

[Read John 5:16-30. Ask to count how many times word "life" is said as we read.]

Pray

So, we begin this passage with a provocation. I had said that healing on the Sabbath was against Jewish law, but when Jesus hears this, he turns around and ups the ante. It's like the Jewish rulers had been slapped in the face so Jesus decides to poke them in the eye. How? Read vs. 17.

It's like he's saying, "Oh, you're bothered that I'm doing 'work' on the Sabbath? That's not a big deal, I'm just doing what my Father, the God of the universe, does!" This just riles them right up and he's just going to keep on going.

But before we go there, I wanted to camp on this for a little bit and ask a question: What exactly is the work of God? When Jesus says I'm doing the work of God, what work is that?

Now here's what's interesting. The religious leaders had taken Sabbath and made it into a chore, a burden. They had actually made following the Sabbath an excuse to allow death and suffering. They had missed the point of it altogether. The Sabbath rest was always about life! And the work that God does on the Sabbath rest is sustaining and giving life.

Whenever Jesus provokes the Jewish rulers over the issue of Sabbath he points them to its purpose: to give life.

Jesus' question to the Pharisee's was always, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill." He heals a withered hand, he feeds the hungry stomachs of his disciples, he heals the crippled man's bondage of 38 years... he is giving life on the Sabbath! This is actually why we can still observe a day of rest today, because we cease from our labors, the things we imagine sustain our life and keep us going, and acknowledge the one who truly gives us life, who truly sustains us. The business of God, the work that he is doing, is life, life, LIFE!

You may have noticed that I keep saying that word, life. That's because it's the word that Jesus is using over and over in this passage. Did anybody count for fun? Well I did. Jesus says the word "life" seven times. What do you think he's trying to tell us about? LIFE!

What Jesus says next is beautiful, rich, theological language. He begins by saying, "Truly, truly." Can you say that with me? "Truly, truly." It literally means, "Amen, amen." It's a way of saying, "What I'm about to say is rock solid. This is God's truth and you better listen!" I recommend you incorporate this into your daily

speech. "Truly, truly, I say to you, your breath smells like garlic." Or "Truly, truly, it rains a lot here." It gets your attention, right? Well, Jesus says, "Truly, truly" three times in this passage, so every time he does we are going to pay attention to what he says.

[Read vs. 19-23]

If you have little children, you know that they love to imitate their parents. That's why they get the little plastic drill, or the little plastic cell phone, or the little plastic makeup case. They look up to their parents and they want to be like them. Well, that is NOT the kind of relationship Jesus has with the Father. Jesus' relationship with the Father is much more profound than that! Jesus is not merely imitating what the Father is doing, he is REVEALING what the Father is doing. Jesus and the Father are one! Whatever the Father does, the Son does also. Jesus is not just doing his best to imitate his Father, he is doing exactly what the Father does! Every imitation is a step down, like a cheap Rolex or an Elvis impersonator. But Jesus is the real deal. And what this means is that through Jesus we can actually see the Father. We can see what God himself is like!

I need you to get how profound this is for us. In the Old Testament there's a story about Moses wanting to see God. He wanted to see God because he knew that the closer to God he was, the more blessed he would be, because God is the source of life! But God tells him, if you see me face-to-face, you will die! "Moses, you can't handle the real deal, you're too broken, too sinful to see me full on." So he sticks him in a cleft in the rocks and puts his hand over him so that Moses gets only a glimpse of him. A glimpse! And it's a glimpse that changes Moses forever.

But now, we see Jesus face to face, we don't have to hide in the cleft of a rock. This is why John says way back in chapter one, we have seen his glory. He's thinking about this story of Moses! We don't get just a glimpse, we see him walking around, living life, doing his work. This is what Jesus is trying to tell us, and it's an amazing claim. Who we see Jesus is, we can trust that God is. What we see Jesus doing, we can trust that God is doing. What Jesus is saying, God is saying.

I'll tell you, when I first really got this it really knocked my socks off. Before, I'd had this visual image of God as this kind of amorphous blob of light, floating out in space somewhere. He's invisible, right? He doesn't look like anything, he's just out there. But when I grasped what Jesus was saying I realized that my image of God was broken. I can make an amorphous blob of light do or say anything. In fact, many of us do. We base our image of God on our own conceptions, maybe we imagine God is like our own fathers, maybe he's distant, maybe he's mean, maybe he's kind but doesn't really know how to hold a conversation with you. That's why I saw God as floating in outer space, because my dad died when I was 12. My dad wasn't there for me! So God, for me, was there, but he was out there, you know, out in the distance. But when God put on skin, he tossed out any speculation and

showed us what he's really, really, like. So for me, Jesus shows me that God isn't out there, he's with us, walking around, hanging out, present.

So what's God really like? He wants to give us life. This leads us to our next truly, truly.

[Read v. 24]

God came and put on human skin, and he came to give us life. Eternal, enduring, abundant life. But it all seems too easy. I have to believe, I have to hear what he's saying. But it's actually not so easy, because we screw it up all the time.

Here's what Jesus is saying: "I and the Father are one. Since the Father is where you find life, I am where you find life." That's simple, right? Here's the thing: some people don't like Jesus, don't want him. Some people would rather hang on to the God they can't see, the one that's out there in space somewhere, the distant one, the amorphous one. They want to skip past Jesus and go to that God, but they end up going to a God of their own choosing, not the God that put on skin and walked with us. And Jesus is saying, "If you want life, you can't skip past me because I and the Father are one."

When I was a teenager I knew a lady who had cancer. I don't remember what kind, but I do remember that it was treatable. But for some reason, this lady decided that carrots would cure her cancer. So she didn't do any chemo, no radiation, no drugs, just carrots. All carrots all the time. Well, as time went on she became weaker and weaker, skin and bones. Eventually she died! The carrots did nothing to stop her cancer and actually made her more sick. She put all her hope into carrots, and they let her down.

Many of us are like this women. We all have a cancer because we live in a sin-sick world. We're all dying. And the things we put our hope in are just bizarre sometimes. We think sports will give us life. Football. Or we think sex will give us life. Or work. Or family. Or theology. Or being right. But none of those are the source of life. Only Jesus can give us true, eternal, enduring, abundant life. And when we put our hope for life in anything else besides Jesus we sign our own death warrant. We judge ourselves! We're like carrot-eating cancer patients.

But Jesus is calling us to trust in him as the source of life, and by doing that we move from death into life. Truly, truly, from death into life.

This leads us to the last truly, truly.

[Read vs. 25-29]

Here's the thing about healing. God could heal us all day. He could heal every single one of us in this room, right now, but we would still have one big problem: we're all going to die someday. This is the world we live in, the kinds of bodies we have. Your body, my body, will eventually fail and decay. The man who had been paralyzed for 38 years that Jesus healed so spectacularly? He still died! Like I said, we live in a sin-sick world and because of this we all come to that same end. So if we're really going to talk about healing, we have to deal with this ultimate question of death. Because God could heal us all, but if we die anyway, what's the point?

For Jesus to be the giver of life, for there to be true healing: inside, outside, all the way through healing, death has to be defeated. So when Jesus talks about giving life, he talks about resurrection, the final defeat of death, and the ultimate healing.

Pastor Mark has already dealt with the question, "Will God heal me?" But I wonder if, instead of "Will God heal me?" we should be asking, "When will God heal me?" There is no "if" to that question, just a matter of when. You see, I think we are too short-sighted. We live as if death wins, sometimes. We think, "If I die, if my loved one dies, God has lost." We think, "If I'm not healed now, if I live a life of pain, God has lost, and death has won." But if we think this way then we do not believe in a God who is in the business of life, true eternal, enduring, abundant, life.

So when we talk about healing we must talk about resurrection, because any healing we experience now is actually an advance payment on resurrection. It's as if the power that God will use to raise all of us from the dead is reaching back in time and touching us just a bit. Jesus has a way of saying this: "an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live." An hour is coming, and is now here! In the last month, for those of us who have been anointed and experienced healing, for those of us who have been prayed for by our friends and the community and experienced healing, whether it's emotional, physical, relationships, whatever... you have experienced a touch of resurrection power now. Just a touch.

And for those of us who haven't experienced healing, believe me when I say this: God is not late. Truly, truly, God is not late. You will get your healing in God's time, and it will be a healing beyond your wildest imagination, an infusion of life that you have only begun to taste of. This is the resurrection of life.

When I was born, I was a big baby. I was eleven pounds, twelve ounces. I was a late baby too. I was born at 9 months, three weeks. I guess I was comfortable. But when I came out I got stuck. Stuck right at the neck. My mom tells me I turned a horrible shade of purplish blue for about a minute. But eventually I popped out, more or less unscathed.

It wasn't until I was three that anybody realized something was out of the ordinary. I would be off in a corner, merrily playing with my toys, not realizing that I was being called for. It turns out that in my birth there had been some nerve damage. I had lost about 20% of my hearing in both of my ears.

When I was seven years old I got my first hearing aid. Today I wear two of them, one on each ear. If I don't wear them, it gets a little harder to communicate. As a child, I quickly learned how embarrassing it is to have to ask someone to repeat themselves so I simply learned to nod my head and say "uh-huh." I still do it sometimes.

My mom was Pentecostal, though, so there was no way I was getting away with being hard of hearing and not being prayed for. So I was prayed for many times. I had Ernest Angley stick his fingers in my ears. But still I was deaf. I went to the Benny Hinn crusades and people got knocked over all around me. But still I was deaf. I was anointed, prayed for, demons cast out of me, every way you could imagine I was prayed for. But still I was deaf.

Do I want to be healed? Absolutely I do! More than most people, I understand how crucial clear communication is for relationships. If I can't hear you, we can't talk. That's frustrating. Sometimes it's devastating.

So as a 31 year old, I am already all too keenly aware of how my body fails me. And as I've gotten older I've come to realize that even if God were to give me my full hearing capacity, I need something more. My eyesight is failing too. The older I get, the more back pain I experience, the more my knees ache. I have a titanium rod in my leg, that's another story to tell. Most telling, my family has a history of high blood pressure and heart disease. That's what took my dad away from me at the age of 56, and it haunts me like a specter. I don't just need a healing. Or two. Or three. I need life. Life eternal, enduring, abundant. We all need life. And we will only find it in Jesus.

This is a time of year when this become especially clear, I think, that we need life. The year ends, a new one begins, and we all think about what needs to change. What habits drag us down, what disappointments do we want to avoid, how do we need to improve? We write these lists, right? We call them New Year's Resolutions. You know what those resolutions are? They're lists of things that need resurrection life. A list of things Jesus needs to heal.

This year, let's do something different. Let's write our list of New Years Resolutions, and let us trust Jesus with them. We're going to call this a New Years Resurrection list. This doesn't mean I want us to lose any sense of ambition. Go ahead and make plans to exercise! Be healthy! But I want our list to go deeper. Where are the areas of your life that need life? What are the things that need changing? What is dying and needs to be resurrected? Is it a marriage? Is it a

failing heart, or illness? Is it a sinful habit you can't seem to shake? A desire you don't want to have?

Can you trust and truly believe that Christ's resurrection power will truly heal these things? "Truly, truly," Jesus says, "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."

We're going to have an opportunity to make those lists now. In your bulletins is a little sheet of paper. Write your New Years resurrection list, and when you are ready come up front and put it on the altar as an act of trust. And I would encourage you to pause a moment and pray. Maybe even something as simple as, "Father I need your new life. I trust and hope in your resurrection for these things." Will you come and find rest in God?

Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
 1. Jesus tells us that "Whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise." Often many of us can see the Father as distant or cold. How do Jesus' actions counter our false notions of the Father?
 2. "You will be amazed." Have you ever been amazed by God or something He has done? Reflect, and if possible share your reflections with someone.
 3. Jesus is in the business of new life. Where do you sense God bringing new life in you? How have you "crossed over from life into death"?