

Hidden Sins
November 1, 2015

How often do you hear someone say something and you think, "That seems an odd thing to say?" Well in today's Bible passage Jesus says something that struck me just that way the first time I came across it. The passage is John 5:1-15

John 5:1-15 (NIV) Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie--the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 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?"

"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."

Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."

But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'"

So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

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." The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

Jesus tells the man to stop sinning. This struck me as odd when I read it some years ago. It seemed a silly thing to say. The man had been unable to walk for 38 years. Evidently he had some use of his arms, for he tells Jesus he tries to get into the water, but is too slow. So evidently he is paralyzed from the waist down to his toes. He has no use of his legs. He could not walk.

I thought to myself, "How can the guy sin if he is paralyzed?" I know now that I thought that because of a limited understanding of sin. Let me illustrate a limited understanding of sin with a story. I was talking many years ago with a man who was dying. I went to tell him about forgiveness of his sins through Jesus. I asked him about his life, and he readily admitted that there were things he had done wrong. He made no claims to being a perfect person. But when I spoke of him being a sinner, he quickly denied it. He said that he had never hurt anyone. He had never stolen anything, never cheated anyone. He had the idea that only those kinds of things were sins. He had never done THOSE things, therefore, in his eyes, he was not a sinner.

Perhaps you hold that same, misguided, definition of sin. Perhaps you think that only things like stealing, killing, robbing, or cheating people are sins. It is true that those are sins. But they are not the kind of sins a paralyzed man could commit in the first century. So it sounds odd to us for Jesus to say, "Stop sinning." But in truth there are many sins even a paralyzed man could commit.

We need to have a clear definition of what sin is. Our English word "sin" is a translation of several Hebrew and Greek words in the Bible. The Old Testament part of the Bible was originally written in Hebrew. The New Testament part of the Bible was originally written, for the most part, in Greek. In your outline are the root meanings of some of these Hebrew and Greek words that have been translated into English using the word sin.

- > "to miss, fail, or fall short" of God's moral, ethical, or spiritual standard
- > "to wander or stray" from God's will or commands
- > "to defy" God, refuse to obey
- > "to be lawless" - to hold in contempt authority, especially God's authority

We can summarize these ideas this way,...

Sin is rebellion against God.

That rebellion can come out in many ways.

Now with this definition of sin, we can look at ways the crippled man could sin. These ways also apply to you and me.

1. To grumble against God is sin. To gripe and complain against God is sin. To express dissatisfaction with what God has provided you is sin.

This was one of the major sins committed by the Israelites when they were in the wilderness. God freed them from slavery in Egypt. God promised to give them farms they did not have to work for or purchase. God would protect them from their enemies on the long trip from Egypt to the Promised Land. And yet they griped and complained over the few hardships they experienced on the way to their new home. They griped and grumbled over God's provisions for their needs. What God provided wasn't good enough for them.

Numbers 14:27 (NIV) "How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites.

Now picture this man Jesus encountered. We can imagine him grumbling about the fact that he was unable to walk. God could have healed him long ago. God could have prevented him from being born this way or the accident that caused his condition. He likely did not voice such thoughts aloud because other people would shun him. But he could have thought such things to himself. He could have grumbled against God silently, in his own heart and mind.

It is true that he wasn't as well off as most people, as he could not walk. He could only beg for money. On the other hand, he wasn't starving. Someone had kept him alive for 38 years. Between begging and his family his needs had been taken care of his whole life. He had things to be thankful for. He could choose to be grateful, or he could choose to gripe against God.

We don't know that he did grumble against God. But he could have done so, just like we can do so. You don't have to be able to walk in order to gripe and complain about what God has or has not given you. Even a paralyzed man can grumble against God.

You may know someone who complains all the time even though you know they have much they could choose to be grateful for. We, who are so much better off than this paralyzed

man, might be tempted to grumble and complain about the fact that we don't live in the house we would like to have or drive the car we would like to own. Many of us don't have the health we would like.

Many of us have gone through a personal or family crisis. Some of the families of our church are doing so right now. The questions are always with us, "Why me? Why us? Why this? Why now?" It is a short step from asking such questions to griping and grumbling against God. Don't allow yourself to take that step. We have much to gripe about if we choose to do so. But choosing to do so is sin.

I am not down-playing the pain or the fear of your crises when I say that there is also much to be thankful for. Every good thing we have is made possible by God. Our attitude towards Him should always be one of gratitude, not grumbling.

He has promised us eternal life in heaven. But until we get there we may have to face trials and sufferings. We must trust that God knows what is best for us in the long term when He allows suffering in the short term. **A more important question than why something is happening to you is this: "How will I respond to this situation?"**

You can choose to focus on your blessings or your sufferings. You can choose to grumble or be grateful. You can choose to trust or rebel. But making the wrong choice is sin.

Grumbling against God is a very serious sin. In God's eyes it ranks up there with stealing. When you grumble against God you are withholding the praise and thanks God should receive from you. It is not possible for you to genuinely praise God one minute and gripe against God the next. True gratitude will prevent grumbling. And grumbling will prevent gratitude. If you are griping and grumbling about your life, you are withholding thanks from God. That is similar to stealing from God something that is rightfully His.

2. To think evil thoughts is sin.

Look at what Jesus says about how actions and thoughts are connected as sin.

Matthew 5:21-22 (NIV) "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.

Jesus says that if you are angry with someone, you are in danger of the same punishment as if you murdered that person. That is because anger can lead to murder. Whatever would lead you to murder someone else is as dangerous to you as actually murdering someone. Anger could do it. Resentment could do it. Hate or jealousy could do it. Whatever leads to sinful actions is also sin. If your anger leads you to hurt someone else, your anger is sin.

These things: anger, resentment, hate, and jealousy do not require hands and feet. Even a paralyzed person can commit such sins. You and I can certainly commit such sins. We can wish someone were dead. This is the same in God's eyes as actually killing them.

3. To speak cutting, hurtful words is sin.

The man with Jesus could not walk, but he could talk. His mouth was not paralyzed. He could sin with his mouth in the things he said to others.

Words are not hidden, but the things in your heart are hidden. No one can see what is in your heart. And it is the sins in your heart that cause the outward sins that people see and hear.

Matthew 15:18-19 (NIV) ... the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man unclean. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

Sinful actions are the product of sin in the heart. One of those sinful actions is with words. Notice that lying and slander are sins you commit with your mouth. Even if you do not sin against someone with your hands or feet, you can sin against them just as painfully with your words. And such actions are still sin.

If words come from your mouth that you intend to hurt someone with, that is sin. And it is sin that is in your heart. Pride, envy, hate, lust, resentment, anger, jealousy, and more can live in your heart. And such sins will come out in your words.

Even a paralyzed person can speak unkind, sinful words against another person. Anyone who can communicate in any way can communicate sinful words. Most of us do so at times. Maybe we only do it when we are stressed or anxious, fearful or tired. But we do it. Sometimes we do it unintentionally, not realizing what we said has hurt another's feelings. But it was done. It is still sin.

These are just a few of the many kinds of hidden sins. You get the idea. So it is not really odd for Jesus to say to the paralyzed man, "Stop sinning, or something worse may happen to you." The man needs to recognize his sin and repent of it. He needs to get right with God. He needs a Savior in order to do so.

Let's look at what Jesus originally asked the man. "Do you want to get well?" Jesus asks the man if he wants to be healed. This too may sound like an odd question. But it is not. Not everyone who is sick wants to be healed.

Many years ago I met a man who lived homeless in the Odenton area. He was an alcoholic. He chose to live as a homeless man. He had family in the area who would have taken him in if he quit drinking. He chose not to do so. He did not want to be healed of his addiction.

That may sound odd until you realize that living on the streets means you have no responsibilities, no work you have to do, no chores, no duties, no obligations. Some of that appeals to us. But we also like the comforts and privileges that come with the responsibilities we have. So we avoid that kind of life. But not everyone does.

The longer your life is a certain way, even a bad way, the scarier it can be to change. The paralyzed man had been like this for 38 years. That is a long time. It can be scary to change when you are not sure what the change will be like. Jesus' question is not so odd.

There are many, though, who want to be healed. How about you? Do you want to be healed today?

All of us are sinners in need of forgiveness and need help for that to happen. Jesus is asking you today, "Do you want to be healed?" Do you want forgiveness of your sins? Do you want to get right with God?

Then admit your sinful condition to God. Give your life over to Jesus to obey Him. Trust in Jesus' death as the full price for all of your sins.