

## LOOK TO JESUS FOR MERCY

*5 After these things there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep [Gate] a pool, which in Hebrew is called Bethesda, and that is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. 5Now a certain man was there, a man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years 6When Jesus saw him lying [there], and knew that he had been in that condition for a long time, he asked him, Do you want to be healed? 7The invalid answered him, Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred up. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me. 8Jesus said to him, Get up, pick up your mat, and walk. 9Immediately the man was healed; he picked up his mat and walked. Now the day [on which this happened] was the Sabbath. 10Therefore the Jews said to [the man] who was healed, This is the Sabbath, so it is not lawful for you to pick up your mat. 11But he answered them, The man who healed me said to me, Pick up your mat, and walk. 12They asked him, Who is the man who said to you, Pick up [your mat], and walk? 13But the man who was healed did not know who it was; for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. 14Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, Look, you are healed; stop sinning, or something worse will happen to you. 15The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. 16Because he did these things on the Sabbath, this is why the Jews persecuted Jesus.*

*17But Jesus answered them, My Father is working even until now, and [so] I am working. 18For this reason the Jews tried even harder to kill him; not only because he broke the Sabbath, but also [because] he called God his own Father, making himself equal with God. 19Jesus therefore responded to them by saying, I tell you the truth, The Son can do nothing by himself, but [only] what he sees the Father doing; for whatever [the Father] does, the Son also does in the same way. 20[This is so because] the Father loves the Son and [therefore] shows him everything that he is doing. Indeed, greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. 21Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son also gives life to whom he desires [to give life]. 22Neither does the Father judge anyone; rather, he has entrusted all judgment to the Son; 23so that everyone may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.*

*Whoever does not honor the Son, does not honor the Father who sent him. 24I tell you the truth, Whoever listens to my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life and will not be condemned; on the contrary, he has crossed over from death into life. 25I tell you the truth, The hour is coming, and even now has arrived, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who listen shall live; 26for just as the Father has life in himself, so also he has granted the Son to have life in himself. 27Furthermore, he has given him authority to judge, because he is the Son of Man. 28Do not be amazed by this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs shall hear his voice 29and shall come out: they who have done good shall be resurrected to life; but they who have done evil shall be resurrected to condemnation. 30I am not able to do anything by myself, I judge only as I hear; and my judgment is righteous, because I do not seek to do my own will, but rather to carry out the will of him who sent me. (Jn. 5:1-30)*

## **Introduction**

Dolphus still remembers the song they used to sing in Sunday School when he was a child growing up in central Mississippi: “I’m working trying to make 100; 99½ won’t do.”

Dolphus admits, “That song scared me if I thought hard about it.”

The song was talking about getting into heaven. It taught that a person had to score 100 in goodness to get there—anything less would not do—and it was all by personal effort!

Dolphus says he worked hard at trying to make the “goodness” grade: at age 8 he joined the church; as a teenager he sang in the choir, and taught Sunday School and became a “junior deacon.” But sometimes when he thought about that song Dolphus would get so upset that he would just cry. He was working hard at it, but he knew he was not making the grade.

We often try to approach God on the basis of personal good works and religious practices; and as we do so we become acutely aware of the fact that we are not making the grade. But here is truly good news: Because God is a gracious God, we can look to the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy.

Dolphus came to discover this good news for himself. A friend invited him to attend a tent meeting one night. There Dolphus heard for the first time that he was a sinner, trying to “make 100” was an impossible task for a sinner to perform. He also learned that God sent His Son, Jesus, to save us when we could not save ourselves. Dolphus testifies:

Suddenly I realized that I’d been seeking to “make 100” to please God. And the whole time He had been willing to give me a clean record with Him—for free! He could untie the bonds of evil holding me. It was so clear that right then I asked Jesus Christ to forgive me and take over my life. (*POWER*, 1/9/83, pp. 2-ff.)

Here is truly good news: Because God is a gracious God, we can look to the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy. We find a testimony and demonstration of God’s mercy in the passage of the Gospel of John presently before us.

### **I. Look to Jesus for Mercy, Because He Shows Mercy to Even the Most Undeserving**

Here in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of John we read that the Lord Jesus went up to Jerusalem at the time of a great religious feast—and there He performed a wonderful act of mercy. The very way in which John presents this whole incident is striking and significant. In verse 1 John informs us that Jesus went up to Jerusalem on the occasion of one of the great religious feasts—a time when the city would be filled

with devout religious worshipers. Then in verses 2-5 John immediately focuses our attention on the Pool of Bethesda, which being translated means, "House of Mercy." This was the place where lay a multitude of the sick, the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. It was the place where many came with the hope of being cured; and others came to die. As John continues his narrative, focusing on the Pool of Bethesda, suddenly in the midst of this multitude of pathetic souls we see Jesus! Do we appreciate what John is conveying to us? Upon coming to Jerusalem, Jesus immediately singles out the place of greatest need, the place of greatest suffering. We find Jesus in this place, offering and ministering His mercy.

As we return to John's narrative, we find that in the midst of this multitude of suffering, one individual is singled out as the object of our attention. He is a man who is helpless. He is in a state of paralysis, thus he cannot get to the healing waters. Furthermore, he has no one to carry him down to those waters; as we shall see, no one wants anything to do with this man—he was a very unlovable soul. He is also a man without hope. He has been in his state of paralysis for 38 years. When Jesus asks him, "Do you want to be healed?" his only response is, "I have no one to help me." Contrast this man's hopeless resignation with the expectant cries of the blind beggar recorded in Mark 10:46-48, for instance,

*Then they came to Jericho. Now as [Jesus] was leaving Jericho, along with his disciples and a large crowd of people, a blind beggar, named Bartimaeus, (whose name means, the son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside. <sup>47</sup>When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. <sup>48</sup>But many people rebuked him, ordering him to keep quiet. But he cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me. (Mk. 10:46-48)*

Or compare this man with the poor father who appealed for faith on behalf of his son,

*Then they brought [the boy] to [Jesus]. When [the spirit] saw [Jesus], he immediately threw [the boy] into a convulsion; he fell to the ground, rolling around and foaming [at the mouth]. <sup>21</sup>[Jesus] asked his father, How long has he been like this? And he said, Since [he was] a child. <sup>22</sup>Often [the spirit] has thrown him into either the fire or the water, to kill him; but if you are able to do anything, have compassion on us and help us. <sup>23</sup>Jesus said to him, If you are able! All things are possible for the one who believes. <sup>24</sup>Immediately the father of the boy cried out, I believe; help my unbelief. (Mk. 9:20-24)*

Not only is this man a pathetic soul, he is also a very unlovable person. Some time after his healing, Jesus makes a special effort to find him in the temple to give him this stern warning: "*stop sinning, or something worse will happen to you*" (vs. 14.) There is not always a direct correlation between sickness and personal sin, as shall become evident in the incident involving the man born blind,

*And as he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>And his disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind? <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, Neither did this man nor his parents sin; this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in his life. (Jn. 9:1-3)*

But in this present case it appears that personal sin did play a major role in the plight of this particular man. By way of a modern day example, we may picture the Lord Jesus walking through the unit of the hospital where care is given to those patients suffering from AIDS. Jesus offers His mercy and healing to one particular patient who contracted the disease as a result of a promiscuous lifestyle, and with the healing Jesus adds the word of warning, *“Stop sinning, or something worse will happen to you.”*

More of this man’s character is revealed through his interaction with the Jews. When the Jews charge this man with Sabbath-breaking because they observe him carrying his mat in the temple precincts, he immediately puts the blame on Jesus, telling the religious leaders that it was Jesus who instructed him to do so (vs. 10-11.) As soon as he learns that it was Jesus who healed him, he immediately goes to the Jews with this information (vs. 15.) He surely must have been aware that this would lead to the consequences described in verse 16: *“Because he did these things on the Sabbath, this is why the Jews persecuted Jesus.”*

Jesus intentionally singled out this man, and bestowed an act of mercy upon him, in order to vividly bring home to us this message: You can look to the Lord Jesus for mercy, because He shows mercy to even the most undeserving. Do you tend to think that your case is unique? That you are beyond God’s mercy? By maintaining such a view, do you realize what you are saying? You are maintaining that yours is a case too hard for God; you are someone who is beyond God’s ability to reach with His mercy. Listen to how God responds to such a view: *“Is anything too hard for Jehovah?”* (Gen. 18:14.) It was to a dying, penitent criminal that Jesus spoke the words recorded in Luke 23:43, *“I tell you the truth, Today you shall be with me in Paradise”*—this is what the Lord Jesus says to each one of us when we approach God as penitent sinners asking for His mercy.

## **II. Look to Jesus for Mercy, Because Now is When God Offers His Mercy to You**

In response to the Jews’ challenging question, “Why do you do such a thing on the Sabbath?” Jesus declares, *“My Father is working even until now, and [so] I am working”* (Jn. 5:17.) Jesus is saying, “I simply watch My Father in heaven, and then I do whatever I see Him doing.”

In one sense, God rested on the seventh day, a fact to which Genesis 2:2-3 testifies,

*And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had made. <sup>3</sup>And God blessed the*

*seventh day, and sanctified it; because in it he rested from all his work that God had created and made.* (Gen. 2:2-3)

That divine rest became the basis for the Old Testament Sabbath,

*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>10</sup>But the seventh day is a Sabbath to Jehovah your God; in it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son, nor your daughter, neither your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor the foreigner who is within your gates; <sup>11</sup>for in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore Jehovah blessed the Sabbath day, and sanctified it.* (Ex. 20:8-11)

But in another sense, God continues to work, even on the Sabbath. What is this work that God continues to perform, even on the Sabbath? Beside His work of providence, (sustaining and governing His creation), Jesus defines God's continuing work as including His acts of mercy. It is the work of inviting men and bringing them into His divine rest and peace: *"Come to me, all you who labor and bear heavy burdens, and I will give you rest"* (Matt. 11:28.)

This miracle performed by the Lord Jesus was not only an act of mercy, it is also a demonstration of what God is like: a demonstration that God is a God of mercy. In verses 19-20 Jesus emphasizes the fact that He is not working independently; on the contrary, He is revealing the very nature and character of God His Father—Jesus only does what He sees His Father doing. Jesus, the Son, observes what His Father is doing, and He does whatever He sees His Father doing (vs. 19.) Indeed, out of love for His Son, the Father reveals to Him everything that He Himself is doing, so that the Son can do the same works (vs. 20a.) Furthermore, the Father will show the Son even greater works, *"so that men may marvel"*—marvel at the power, the glory, and the mercy of God (vs. 20b.) In effect, Jesus is saying, "You have just seen Me perform an act of mercy in the form of healing this poor wretched man's body; but you haven't seen anything yet! There are even greater works that I will yet perform!"

What are these *"greater works"* of which the Lord Jesus speaks? They include the work of giving spiritual life to men (vs. 21.) In mercy, Jesus restored a poor wretched man's body to health. In mercy, Jesus is willing to restore our souls to life—to reconciliation and fellowship with God, note verse 24, *"I tell you the truth, Whoever listens to my word and believes him who sent me, he has eternal life and will not be condemned; on the contrary, he has crossed over from death into life."* But these *"greater works"* also include the work of carrying out the final judgment (vs. 22.) So then, the *"greater works"* to which Jesus refers, are two in number: At present, the work of offering and dispensing the mercy of God to penitent sinners; at a future date, the work of executing the righteous judgment of God upon unrepentant sinners.

Notice carefully the order of these two greater works. This is the time when Jesus is actively offering and dispensing God's mercy to save and restore repentant sinners (vs. 25.) Note, also, the testimony of John 3:16-17,

*... for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup>God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world; but [rather], that the world might be saved through him. (Jn. 3:16-17)*

The day still lies in the future, but will come, when the Lord Jesus shall execute God's final judgment upon a world of unrepentant sinners (vs. 28-29.)

We can look to the Lord Jesus for mercy, because now is the time when God offers His mercy to us in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus declared that He had come to fulfill the prophecy recorded in Isaiah 61:2,

*He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. On the Sabbath day he went to the synagogue, as he was accustomed to doing. And he stood up to read. <sup>17</sup>The book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. He opened the scroll and found the place where it was written, <sup>18</sup>The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the captives, the recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, <sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor. <sup>20</sup>Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were focused on him. <sup>21</sup>And he began to say to them, Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. (Lk. 4:16-21)*

It is significant that in quoting this passage of Old Testament prophecy, Jesus omitted the latter part of Isaiah 61:2, the part that refers to the executing of the judgment of God: *"The LORD has anointed me ... <sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God"* (Isa. 61:1-2.) As the Apostle Paul testifies, *"I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation"* (2 Cor. 6:2.)

### **III. Look to Jesus for Mercy, And then Show Mercy to Others**

This miracle performed by the Lord Jesus is not only a demonstration of what God is like, it is also a demonstration of what God expects His people to be like, how He expects us who have become the recipients of His mercy to live. Bear in mind the occasion when Jesus performed this miracle of mercy. It was performed at the time of one of the great Jewish feasts: a great multitude of Jews would be present in Jerusalem, devout Jews intent upon fulfilling their religious obligations to God. It was performed on a Sabbath day.

By means of this miracle, Jesus was clearly intending to arouse the attention of the Jews, and their response was not long in coming. As soon as they see the man carrying his mat, the Jews rebuke him for breaking the Sabbath (vs. 10.) It is tragic that these people, although extremely religious, had become so spiritually blind. They could not and would not recognize the work of God in their midst, to them it appeared to be a clear case of Sabbath-breaking. They could not perceive the nature and the heart of the God they professed to worship. By means of this act of healing—this display of mercy—Jesus by His deeds is conveying the same lesson He verbally expressed in Matthew 9:13, *“Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice, for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners’”* (Matt. 9:13.)

God desires that we practice mercy, in the form of actively caring for fellow Christians in their time of need:

*Then the King shall say to those on his right, Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world; <sup>35</sup>for I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; <sup>36</sup>I was naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you took care of me; I was in prison, and you came to visit me. <sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will respond to him by saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you? Or thirsty, and give you a drink? <sup>38</sup>And when did we see you a stranger, and take you in? Or naked, and clothe you? <sup>39</sup>And when did we see you sick, or in prison, and visit you? <sup>40</sup>Then the King shall answer and say to them, I tell you the truth, Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me. (Matt. 25:34-40)*

God desires that we practice mercy, in the form of compassionately ministering to those whom God brings across our path:

*In reply Jesus said, A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him and beat him and then left, leaving him half dead ... <sup>33</sup>But a certain Samaritan, as he traveled, came to the place where the man was; and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. <sup>34</sup>He came to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. Then he sat him on his own donkey and brought him to an inn and took care of him ... and Jesus said ... Go, and do the same. (Lk. 10:30,33-34,37)*

God desires that we practice mercy, in the form of extending forgiveness to those who have wronged or injured us:

*Then his master summoned the servant and said to him, You wicked servant, because you begged me, I cancelled all your debt. <sup>33</sup>Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you? <sup>34</sup>His master*

*was angry and handed him over to the jailers until he should pay back all that he owed. <sup>35</sup>My heavenly Father will do the same to each of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. (Matt. 18:32-35)*

The essence of true religion does not consist in the legalistic observance of religious practices; rather, it consists in imitating and reflecting the character of our God and Savior—both in His holiness and in His mercy.

## **Conclusion**

We can look to the Lord Jesus for mercy, because He shows mercy to even the most undeserving. We can look to the Lord Jesus for mercy, because this is the time when God offers His mercy to us. We can look to the Lord Jesus for mercy, and then we must extend that same mercy to others: at home, at church, at work, in the community, and to those whom God brings across our path.