

I. Jesus, the pool of Bethesda, the lame man

A. John 5:9b-17 . . . Now it was the Sabbath on that day. [10] So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet." [11] But he answered them, "He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Pick up your pallet and walk.'" [12] They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up your pallet and walk'?" [13] But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place. [14] Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you." [15] The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. [16] For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. [17] But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."

B. Pray

II. One more lesson about discouragement, despair, depression

A. Last Sunday, one of the things we talked about was the sick man's mindset and resulting attitude toward his 38 years of hardship.

1. And I pointed out last Sunday that one of the devil's tricks is to get you to feel sorry for yourself – because if he can do that, he can more easily get you to turn your heart away from God and toward self-pity, which in then opens the door to discouragement, despair, and depression – which is another of the devil's tricks.
2. Now I understand that our culture has made much of nurturing a positive attitude and a positive self-image. And I know that many in our culture believe that depression is a disease, and that the best way to treat it is with medication.
 - a. Now I want to be clear that some depression is the result of chemical imbalances in the body, and medication is helpful in limiting the effects of those imbalances.
 - b. However, most depression – that is, about 90% of depression – is a trick of the devil, as is self-pity, discouragement, and despair.

3. And why does the devil want us to wallow in discouragement, despair, and depression? Because they produce a whole set of thoughts, desires, and behaviors that are self-destructive, and damage relationships, and feed distrust of God, while reinforcing selfishness.
4. In other words, the devil wants us to be discouraged, to feel hopeless, and to be depressed because these things get us to take our focus off God, off His honor, His goodness, His love, and His efforts to transform us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, and to turn our focus on ourselves – in self-destructive, spiritually harmful, relationship damaging ways.
5. Therefore, I urge you to fight discouragement, despair, and depression, as you would any of the devil's temptations. And if you want help from God's word for doing battle against these tricks of the devil, I recommend beginning with Psalm 37 and 73. These are not the only chapters on this matter, but they are informative and helpful for resisting the devil's temptations regarding discouragement, despair, and depression, and for clinging to God – in faith and hope.

III. Stop sinning so worse things won't happen to you

- A. John 5:14 . . . Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you."
 1. Today, I want to spend some time focusing on these words, "do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you." And I want to make some preparatory comments before moving forward.
 - a. First, this is the only place in the NT that words this clear and this pointed are written. And I am pointing this out because too often Christians have overstated or exaggerated the implications of a single statement in the scripture. For my part, I will do my best to stay true to God's entire word as I deal with this statement.
 - b. Second, when dealing with NT teachings, the significance of the OT teachings should not be minimized or overlooked. Therefore, I will include OT teachings on this topic in our study today.
 - c. Third, though these words are clear and pointed, the way of God has always included room for coming to our senses, confessing, and repenting, which in turn receives a response from God of grace, mercy, forgiveness, and restoration of relationship. So please keep this in mind as we look at these words.
 - d. Finally, the reason for taking the time to seriously consider these words is because paying attention to them and measuring your life and evaluating the circumstances in your life according to

- them will make you wiser in relation to God and godly living, and it will reduce the trials, tribulations, and suffering in your life.
2. With those four preparatory statements in mind, I believe want to begin by reminding you that we are in a covenant relationship with God.
 - a. And according to Webster's dictionary, *a covenant is a mutual agreement of two or more persons or groups to fulfill specifically stated obligations toward each other.*
 - b. Now I am aware that we do not spend a lot of time promoting the fact of our covenant relationship with God, but nonetheless, our relationship with Him is based on the new covenant – which was purchased and ratified by Jesus shed blood, and made complete when we repent and trust in Jesus for salvation from the penalty and power of sin.
 3. Now the reason there is a new covenant is because there was a previous covenant between God and His people. We read in Exodus 19:5-7, along with numerous other OT scriptures, that Israel was in a covenant relationship with God. And we know from Deuteronomy 28, that from God's side of the covenant, He promised to be their God, and to protect them and bless them. Likewise, we know that Israel's part was to obey God and live according to His commandments.
 - a. For example, Deuteronomy 28:1-14 contains a list of the many ways God would love, care for, and bless Israel. In other words, God promised to bless them in every way necessary for them to lead a quiet, peace-filled life with sufficient provision to meet all their needs, and sufficient protection to guard them against outsiders coming in and taking or destroying what God had given them.
 - b. In contrast to God's promise of blessings, we read in Deuteronomy 28:15-68, that if Israel disobeyed God and chose to live contrary to God's commandments, they would incur and therefore experience many kinds of troubles and suffering.
 4. Now if you do the math, you can see that the promises of God fill 14 verses while the consequences of breaking the covenant fill fifty-three verses.
 - a. And because the consequences side of the covenant between God and Israel give us an OT picture of "worse things happening for continuing in sin," I will give you a quick summary of them.
 - b. And as I go through this summary, notice that the consequences get worse as the covenant breaking gets worse or more prolonged.

5. Summary of the curses for breaking the covenant with God.
 - a. Vs 15-19 – poverty of all sorts and in numerous ways;
 - b. Vs 20-26 – natural disasters, bad weather (*flooding, drought, wind damage*), damage to or loss of crops and possessions, valuable things broken or destroyed, loss of health;
 - c. Vs 27-34 – anxiety, paralyzing fear, despair, hopelessness, heart-break, depression, mental illness;
 - d. Vs 35-46 – the surrounding nations will talk about their astonishment at how far a once great nation has fallen, and how many bad things are happening to the people (*the loss of honoring God by how they live and the loss of fear by outside nations now that God is no longer on their side*);
 - e. Vs 47-62 – horrible conditions that will drive extreme behavior – such as hunger to the point of becoming cannibalistic, and even to the point of eating their own babies and young children;
 - f. Vs 63-68 – overpowered and carried away by a foreign nation.

- B. When Jesus told the sick man, “do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you,” you can see from my summary of the OT covenant curses, that continuing to sin would bring worse consequences – especially after receiving forgiveness, grace, and blessings from God.
 1. Now it would be easy to see these “worse things” as punitive or punishment from an angry God. And sadly, many see these things this way.
 2. However, I want to make it clear that the intentions of the blessings was to convince Israel (*and us*) that obedience is the only way to the abundant life, while the intentions of the curses was to call Israel (*and us*) to repentance, and back to faithful obedience, and back to a godly life that pleases and honors God.
 - a. In other words, the blessings are not merely rewards for godly living, and the curses are not merely punishment for disobedience.
 - b. For example, the blessings are intended to reinforce the truth that God’s way is the best way, and that it is living in God’s blessings that brings true joy and peace.
 - c. In like manner, the curses are remedial in nature – just as God’s discipline today is remedial. In other words, the primary role of the curses was curative – that is, they were grab the sinner’s attention, bring him to his senses, bring about moral and spiritual healing, and restore the sinner or sinning nation to a right and loving relationship with God.

- C. And this brings us to the New Covenant – as presented in the NT.
1. Jesus made it clear that He was establishing a new covenant between God and man.
 - a. We read this in Luke 22:19-20, “And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ [20] And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.’”
 - b. The writer of Hebrews also speaks of the New Covenant, in Hebrews 8:6-13 and in Hebrews 9:1-22.
 2. Paul, in writing to the church at Corinth not only refers to the new covenant, but also speaks of “worse things” happening if we continue in sin.
 - a. Listen carefully as I read 1 Corinthians 11:23-32 . . . For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; [24] and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." [25] In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." [26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. [27] Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. [28] But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. [29] For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. [30] For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. [31] But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. [32] But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.
 - b. Just like the curses from the OT, the warning of judgment is not merely punitive, it is remedial. Its purpose is to turn us away from ongoing, unrepented sin, and to return us to a whole-hearted, whole-life pursuit of godliness.
 3. Though Peter does not mention the new covenant, he does address the truth that worse things can happen if we continue in sin. And so we read in 2 Peter 2:20-22 . . . For if, after they have escaped the

defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome (*notice, he is not talking about commit one or two sins, or the occasional sin, but remaining in sin – without repenting and returning to godly living*) the last state has become worse for them than the first. [21] For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. [22] It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire."

4. And to provide just one from NT scripture reinforcing that the consequences for breaking the covenant are remedial, I will read from Hebrews 12:5-13, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; [6] for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives." [7] It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? [8] But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. [9] Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? [10] For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. [11] All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. [12] (*at this point, the writer shows how we are to respond to God's discipline*) Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, [13] and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

D. So how does this apply to us today?

1. We can either persevere in resisting temptation, putting away sin, and pursuing godliness in all our behavior, or we can allow some sin to remain in this or that area of our lives.
 - a. The first way will make our life easier and draw us deeper and deeper into the abundant life and intimacy with God.
 - b. The second way will make our life harder by bringing God's remedial work in seeking to get our attention, bring us to our

senses, bring about moral and spiritual healing, and restore us to a right and loving relationship with God.

2. And so I am urging you to believe that righteousness brings God's blessings, while unrighteousness brings God's discipline – which means worse things will happen to you until you come to your senses, repent, and return to godly living.
3. Have you given serious consideration that God's blessings and discipline are active in your life? If you haven't, then I encourage you to look thoughtfully and carefully at your past and your present circumstances to see if can begin to pick up occasions and patterns of blessing and remedial discipline.
 - a. And if you see what is there to see (*I see it in my life*), learn from it, and use it as motivation to press on toward holiness – in all your behavior.
 - b. One way of looking at this that helps me is to remind myself that life is hard enough without adding the additional trials and tribulations of God's remedial discipline to it.
4. Now I want to be clear that this does not mean that all trials and tribulation are God's discipline for sin, but it does mean that some of it is, and we are always wise to at least see if God is trying to get our attention when bad things come our way.

IV. Conclusion

- A. I am going to read from Ezekiel 33, and I understand that it is an OT scripture, whereas we are living in NT times. However, it is worth considering in light of what we talked about today, and to make it easier to hear, I will put it into NT language.
- B. Ezekiel 33:11-12 . . . “As I live!” declares the Lord GOD, “I take no pleasure in the punishment and ultimate eternal death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! The righteousness of a righteous man will not deliver him from God's remedial discipline in that day when he chooses to sin or chooses to return to old sinful ways. However, the one who acts sinfully will not remain under God's discipline or even punishment if he turns from his wickedness.