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No One to Help

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Series: The Mind of Christ

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.
INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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The place was a sea of untouchables. Wall-to-wall misery. It was a portrait of unbearable scenes of human suffering, each one decidedly different, each one seemingly more pitiful than the other, none related to the one next to it. Yet, added together, they emerged as an island of grief surrounded by oceans of hopelessness.

This was where people came who had no hope. Located near the edge of the north wall to the city of Jerusalem, there was a pool, surrounded by five porches or colonnades that created an arcade-like walkway around the pool. It was not far from what was known at that time as the Sheep Gate, an entrance to the city rebuilt by Eliashib, the high priest and his fellow priests in Nehemiah 3:1.

The pool was called Bethesda. There was a mysterious element surrounding this pool. Resting beneath a series of huge, arched pillars, the pool had a subterranean stream that flowed beneath it, and at unexpected intervals, the stream bubbled up and disturbed the peacefulness of the otherwise calm waters.

This was no shallow pond. The word used here for pool, is *κολυμβηθρα* (*kolumbethra*), which comes from the word, to dive. It was deep enough to dive in, hence dangerous for someone who could not swim. A tale had been handed down for generations that when that pool began to bubble, it had supernatural healing powers, but only for the first person to touch its magnificent waters once the activity began. Such superstition was not uncommon, for the mystery of the inexplicable powers of water had been perpetuated by man for centuries. Though a few manuscripts attribute its healing powers to an angel of the Lord, there was no real proof to substantiate that claim.

So the area around these porches near this pool had become a haven for the handicapped. Men and women who were crippled, blind, diseased, or in some other way physically impaired, would camp beside its waters waiting for that fateful day when the waters would stir and they would be the first one into its healing flow. It was not a pleasant place to be. Here were people who could not, in some cases, bathe themselves, who could not feed

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themselves, some who could not see or hear what was going on and could be taken advantage of by passers-by. There was, no doubt, an unpleasant odor, and an atmosphere of depression and gloom. Charlatans, offering cures must have been a regular part of the scene, and greedy relatives, hoping to help their loved ones, would no doubt push and shove pathetic souls aside in order to bring hope to their afflicted.

Not a pretty sight. It was a good place not to go unless you had to. Jesus had to, just as He had to go through Samaria. His Father led Him to that pool for a reason. And the reason would alter the course of one man's life, of Jesus' ministry, and hopefully, of our concepts of what is and what is not ministering.

The Master was returning from Capernaum. The reason for His return was to attend one of the Jewish feasts, possibly the feast of Pentecost. You and I, had we been Jesus, would have had our entourage of disciples go before us, find the finest accommodations, stay out of the way of the common folk, and settle somewhere where our ministry could best be seen and heard.

Not Jesus. He gravitated to wherever the most unlovable, unacceptable people were. They knew they needed something. The more desperate they were, the more likely they were to cry out to God for deliverance. So His ministry was often a ministry to the outcasts. Hence, this was the perfect place to find Jesus in Jerusalem. I would have walked miles to avoid this place. Wherever you looked, you saw suffering. Men with withered limbs, missing eyes and ears, bodies infested with boils, people who could not eat, people who could not see, people who could not walk. And the closer you got, the more frantic it got.

Each one was listening or looking, hoping for some sign of activity in that supposedly miraculous body of water. Scoffers or jesting teens no doubt would come and toss rocks into the pool to watch these pathetic souls, thinking it was the appointed time, scramble over one another trying to get near the water's shore. And all for naught. Though no record seems to exist that anyone was ever healed by its touch, the ounce of hope that rested in the bosom of these desperate men and women would not go away.

As the Master approached the pool that day, there must have been dozens of wailing, moaning, frantic people lying there. We only have record that He spoke to one. He approached the most pathetic one of all. This poor man had been incurably ill

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for thirty-eight years. No physician had given him a ray of hope. But he could not believe there was not some way out. So he had someone carry him to the pool of Bethesda by the Sheep Gate, and he waited.

We don't know for sure how long he had been there. At least one translation reads: "Jesus knew he had been there a long time". The Savior, filled with love, had to minister to that man. Here is the story:

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?"
(John 5:1-6 NIV)

Would you have invested your life in this man? How interesting it is that so many Christian groups talk about "investing" themselves in those with the "most potential". The "most potential" often means those who are the most acceptable in the world's scheme of things. Their testimony "will carry more weight", they argue. Beloved, we don't have a clue as to what success is, and we don't see potential the way God does. To God, the one with the greatest potential is the one who in and of himself cannot help himself. This man qualified. He was as hopeless a case as you could get. Unless something supernatural happened, his life was not worth living. Enter Jesus.

The Master's heart broke when He saw this man. Here was a man akin to someone with Aids in our generation. His demise was assumed. His usefulness to society was minimal, in fact he was a drain on society, for others had to care for him. While many would write editorials on his saddened condition, few would dare to touch him or feed him or carry him or fellowship with him.

If you don't believe me, try putting yourself in a wheel chair in old clothes, make yourself in some way disfigured looking, and park yourself by the front door of any church in America. See how much love you get. Most people will walk all the way to the

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back of the church to keep from having to confront you. See how many invite you home for lunch. See how many hug you. See how many ask you what they can do to get involved in your life. See how many want to disciple you. See how many want you to join their Bible Study group. Find the church with the sign “The friendliest church in town” and try again. Chances are, nothing will change.

The Master was drawn to this man. We would be repulsed. This encounter would be beneath us, unless of course we have learned the secret of humbling ourselves. That awesome command, “Let this mind be in you” ought to haunt us day and night. What mind? The mind of Christ, “who thought it not robbery to be equal with God but made Himself nothing.” That mind. The mind of one who, “being found in fashion as a man, humbled Himself.” The man’s response pointed directly to the problem. Listen:

“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.” (John 5:7 NIV)

No one to help. What a pitiful commentary on human behavior. Here was one, who for thirty-eight painful years had suffered reproach and shame, who lived in the very center of religious activity in the world, in Jerusalem. All of the Pharisees and scribes were within screaming distance of this man. The people to whom God had given His heart were headquartered in the very same circle of land that had become a living grave for this tormented soul. But there was no one to help.

The people, you see, were too busy being religious to care. They had their prayers to say, their feasts to attend, their animals to sacrifice. They were too busy studying which regulations applied to which situation to see this pitiful soul as someone God had placed in their path. They were on their way to church. And they mustn’t be late for church. So they passed him by. Again and again, they passed him by. No one cared. No one shared. No one, that is, until Jesus came.

Have you ever wondered how many hurting people there are within three blocks of the church where you worship? Within three rows of where you are sitting, when you are sitting in church? Within three houses of the house you live in? Have you ever wondered how many hurting people there are in the nursing homes and hospitals you pass by as you drive to church? Have

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you ever wondered how many homeless people there are living within five miles of where you live? We don't even wonder, do we? We would have to think about it to wonder and that would make us uncomfortable. And surely God didn't intend for us to be uncomfortable, did He?

The problem so many of the hurting in our day suffer from is no different than this man's problem. There's no one to help. There's no one even among those who call themselves Christians who will stop their frenzied activities long enough to come to the pool of grief where they are and ask if they want to be helped. Some don't. Some don't know. But, oh, there are so many who are just waiting for someone to ask.

The mind of Christ asks. We know that, because we have seen Him alive on planet earth. Listen to His command to this weary, broken, disabled man:

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.

(John 5:8-13 NIV)

This was not a "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" dare that Jesus was throwing at the man. He was genuinely crippled. Apart from a miracle, he was not going anywhere, let alone carrying anything. In thirty-eight years, he had never so much as taken a step. He had never walked through the streets of Jerusalem with his family or taken a stroll through the country side. He couldn't walk. Until now.

No, this was a challenge to reason. Imagine being totally lame, having never walked, waiting in vain for years just for a chance to dip in the pool, and then imagine having a total stranger walk up and suddenly say to you, "Get up. Pick up your mat and walk." Had it not been for the authority of the Living Word, he

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would have laughed in derision. But something about Jesus was different. And when he said, “get up”, you wanted to get up.

At this stage, the man was not a believer. He not only did not know that Jesus was God, he didn't even know His name. But he knew one thing. He knew he could walk.

The straw-like cots that people slept on in those days were the kind you could roll up and carry over your shoulder. Jesus commanded him not only to walk but to carry his mat. Jesus had a reason for this. He was trying to test the heart of the religious establishment. He wanted to see if they were more interested in policy than power; more concerned about law than life. Indeed they were.

Here was a man known to the whole community for his inability to function. He couldn't even go from place to place without being carried by someone else. Now here he was, walking through the streets of Jerusalem in the midst of feast time, a smile on his face the width of Israel, his weather-beaten sleeping mat over his shoulder, like a soldier on his way home from the wars, rather than a helpless, hopeless crippled man whose life was a shambles. You would think that the entire city would stop and have a praise meeting. You would think that someone would stand up in the synagogue and give a testimony. You would think that it would be the lead story on the ten o'clock news. You would think...or would you?

Sure enough, the rabbis did take note. Not that he was healed, but that he had the audacity to carry his mat on the Sabbath. God had said that the Sabbath day was to be different from other days, because during creation God rested on the Sabbath. So one day a week, man was to rest as well. The Jews, however, decided, as they did with the other laws, to complicate them through definition. They decided to define “work”. It was a perfect picture of how man can distort truth trying to define truth.

They came up with thirty-nine different classifications of work. One of these was that carrying anything constituted a burden, therefore it was work. They took two passages, Jeremiah 17 and Nehemiah 13, and used them as justification for their preposterous conclusions. It was obvious from the passages that what God intended was that trading on the Sabbath day just as though it were any other day was not in keeping with God's

Sabbath-rest principle. The rabbis in Jesus' day, however, had so perverted the law that they said carrying a needle in your robe on the Sabbath constituted a burden, and therefore it was work.

There was great dispute among the Jewish leaders as to whether or not a person could wear false teeth or a wooden leg on the Sabbath. (Some of us couldn't come to church.) So when they saw this poor man, so miraculously healed, so deliriously happy, carrying his straw mat home on the Sabbath, instead of rejoicing over his healing, they threatened to arrest him for breaking the Sabbath. That's how far from truth they had strayed. But don't laugh. Many of the traditions and man-made rules of our day are almost as ridiculous.

You can imagine what a heart-stopping, disillusioning experience it must have been for this man. For thirty-eight years he had been hopelessly crippled, unable to care for himself, to live by himself, to walk, to run, to be a normal human being. In a single moment this stranger had changed his entire life. Now he is shocked from his euphoric state and his whole world crashes to the ground as the very people who ought to have been encouraging him are rebuking him for breaking the law, a law he never thought he would be able to break. He was carrying something on the Sabbath. They accosted him this way: "Who had the audacity to wash away thirty-eight years of suffering and let you do this horrible thing...walking, carrying your bed on the Sabbath?" His answer was simple. He said, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk'."

Such nerve. They asked him, "Who is this horrible man?" I love what he said. A loose translation would be: "I haven't the foggiest idea who He is...He just healed me and left." Jesus, it seems, had quietly slipped into the crowd and walked away. He was God incarnate. He had just performed an incredible miracle that was sure to make headlines and quadruple the scope of His ministry. And what does He do? He slips into the background and walks away. His goal was not to call attention to Himself or to His ministry, but to His Father. This man didn't know His Father personally. He was about to have a chance to meet Him. The healing scenario had a much deeper purpose. Healing wasn't His ministry; healing was His method. His ministry was the restoration of fallen man to a personal relationship with His God. He came to "seek and to save that which is lost." Period. Anything else He did, He did to facilitate that calling. Oh, that

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Christians today could be reacquainted with that reality.

The story continues:

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.

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him.

Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”

For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Jesus gave them this answer: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.

“For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these.

“For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

“Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son,

that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” (John 5:14-24 NIV)

There was the crux of His calling—that men and women might “cross over” from death to life. Death could become a door; life could become a reality; and whosoever will could “cross over”. There’s the gospel in one verse. This man who now could walk went back to his accusers and answered their question. They wanted to know who did this awful thing; who healed this man of his dreadful disease on the Sabbath and commanded him to carry the very evidence of his transformation for all to see.

“Jesus of Nazareth...He it is who changed my life,” the man exclaimed. And that was all they needed. For Jesus, having

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healed the man's body, now proceeds to the reason He did: that the man might know the living God. He now could. For the Father had given His only Son the right and the responsibility to give eternal life to whomever He was pleased to give it.

Jesus represented Himself to be the equivalent of God in human form. That was the icing on the cake. That was all they needed to conclude their inquisition by default. It never dawned on them that if He was who He said He was, Messiah had come. It made more sense to create a smokescreen and question His authority so you didn't have to deal with His message. And no wonder—His message had to do with sin.

That is not the message man wants to hear. Never has been. Never will be. The second message man does not want to hear is a message of dependence, man becoming a slave of God. And what Jesus said that day has rocked society every since. Having healed a man who had been incurable for thirty-eight years, having then proclaimed Himself to be God's own Son, having claimed the power to give eternal life through forgiveness of sin, He then tells the secret of His power. He says, "I tell you the truth; the Son can do nothing of Himself."

So not only was this man representing Himself to be representing God, He was saying that He was only a shell inhabited by God Himself. God was alive and well. He was living inside this Jewish carpenter and preparing to live in you and in me as well.

Look at the lessons this story imparts to us:

1- Jesus went where we won't go.

You and I would not have gone to the pool of Bethesda. You say, "How do you know?" Well, there are hundreds of such pools in the city in which you live: places where the hurting are congregating, just waiting for someone to help them into the healing waters of life. But no one does. There is no one to help. Why not? Where are we? Like the Pharisees of old, we are too busy ironing our ecclesiastical garments of self-righteousness to busy ourselves with the likes of dirty folk like them. At some point in time, we are going to have to go where Jesus went or we will never see what Jesus saw. Jesus saw transformation, because He was taking His message of hope to the hopeless; He was taking healing to those who knew they were sick, comfort to

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those who knew they needed help. He went to the equivalent of the seediest old folks home in town. He went to the equivalent of the county hospital where the drunks and the derelicts and what society calls trash come for help. He humbled Himself and went where people can't walk or talk or earn their livings like the rest of us. He went there. We stay here.

2- He did no self-promoting.

In verse 41 of the same chapter, He said this: "I do not accept praise from men." What a verse to memorize. We not only accept it, we seek it. He healed this poor man and slipped quietly into the background to wait for the moment when what He did would best call attention to who He was. We want immediate recognition for everything we do. Jesus sought no glory. To do so would have been to steal glory from the Father. It still does.

3- He didn't change His message to appeal to the religious system.

Had he done that, He would have perpetuated His physical ministry and negated His spiritual ministry. That's a price He would not pay. And neither should we.

4- He never stopped reminding people that He could do absolutely nothing by Himself.

You must get tired of hearing that. I think the twelve got tired of it too. It makes us out to be weaklings who need God for our every breath. It makes us out to be nothing more than conduits through which power flows; none of the power originates with us. The world hates that. It did then. It does now. The problem is: that's the gospel. The gospel is that man could not, so God did. Now man cannot, so God does.

Nobody likes to hear that. When Jesus first said it, it cut the size of his congregation 90%. But He hadn't come to build a congregation, He had come to draw men to total, complete dependence on His Father. And to do that, He had to live for thirty-three years without ever doing so much as one single thing on His own. That's what He said. And that's what He did.

And now He lives in you. Now He lives in me. Dear God, how can we live such self-centered lives? How can the focus of our conversations, our endeavors, our plans, all be on what pleases us? How can we set out to do God's will and place limits on what

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God's will might be? And dear God, how can we ignore the people You went to without so much as giving You the freedom to take us down the same dusty streets to the same dirty people You gave Your life to and for.

Oh, they are still there. Take a walk this week to the places you don't usually go and see for yourself. Set God free to be Himself without any limitations. Go where the dying are, the lonely are, the crippled are, the weeping are. And as you go, listen carefully. I think you will hear what Jesus heard. You will hear them whisper with all the strength they can muster, "I don't want to stay this way, but there's no one to help."

No one to help? The answer is still the same. No one but Jesus. Ah, but where is Jesus now? He is waiting, Beloved, for you and me to set Him free to be... Himself again. If we do, guess what? There need never be "no one to help" again.

NO ONE TO HELP

No one to help, what a horrible thought!
We who by God's precious blood have been bought.
Stand idly by with so many crying,
Stay cloistered in safety with so many dying.

While Jesus, who lives in you and in me
Still waits to go forth and set men free.
No one to help? Oh, dear God, that is sin,
May it never be said of us again.

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