

ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH

SERMON FROM MAY 26, 2024

JOHN 5: 1-15

“WHAT TO DO AFTER GOD HELPS YOU”

In 1860 a bad shipwreck occurred near Evanston, Illinois in Lake Michigan. A wind storm caused a ship to run aground. A bad winter storm was underway---frigid temperatures and high winds. The ship broke up in the heavy waves a little distance from the beach. A man named Edward Spencer watched this happen from the shore and then saw the passengers struggling for their lives in the water. He went in to save their lives, dragging them to shore. He went in once and saved a life. He turned right around to re-enter the frigid water and saved another. He did this over and over again and ended up saving 17 lives. But by doing so he ruined his own health---just too much time in the near freezing water. He lived for quite some time afterwards, but was never well again. And finally the after effects of his heroic day ended his life. It was remarked at his funeral that not *one* person he saved ever thanked him! (Warren Wiersbe, Commentary on Colossians).

That is an extreme case of unthankfulness----but it happens. If someone helps *us*, how should we respond? Obviously by thanking the person. And how about if God helps us? How do we respond?

Today’s gospel lesson, John 5: 1-15, is relevant to these questions....The reading tells us of a man who needed help badly! He had been paralyzed for 38 years. He stayed near a miraculous pool in Jerusalem where every so often an angel stirred the water and healing could happen if you got in the pool. But he couldn’t move and no one would lift a finger to get him in the water at the right time. 38 years! His position was hopeless---and then Jesus Christ came to him. And He healed him instantly. Jesus came. Jesus spoke to him. Jesus healed him.

The question I am asking today is: how did the now healthy paralytic respond to what had happened? Looking at how he responded may help us to examine what our response is when God helps us. We will look at 3 responses by the healed paralytic.

FIRST--- This response we see in verse 14 of our gospel lesson-----“Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple”. After Christ healed him the man went to the temple to give thanks to God for helping him. Do we do that? If we have a big problem and we pray and pray to God to help us.....and then God answers by helping us..... How do we respond? You would think that if God helped us in some big way we would never miss going to church again! We would go all the time to continually for the rest of life thank Him for His huge help to us. But that’s not always what happens. Many who get helped from God only rarely, maybe never, come to the temple, to church, to give thanks.

When God answers your prayer and helps you, don't forget to always remember. And to always come to the church to thank Him!

Perhaps we need to work on our memories. At least of how God has helped us.... A woman named Jill Price has what is called "over developed memory". Her case was written up in a scientific journal in 2006. The research article is entitled----"A Case of Unusual Autobiographical Remembering". She is not particularly good at memorizing all 50 state capitals, or all the presidents, or every nation on the continent of Africa, etc. But when it comes to her past, her memory is bizarrely good. If an interviewer asks her about a date in her past....say, October 13, 2002..she can recall everything about that day: the weather, what she ate for lunch, what book she read, who she spoke to on the phone and what the conversation was about....and on and on and on. This is true for any date in her life, going back over 30 years. Researchers have checked the truthfulness of what she tells them....and her memories are very accurate. ("Our Daily Bread", 3/10/10)

Perhaps we aren't quite like that! But we should try to always remember ways that God has helped us by answering a prayer. Maybe we got well from an injury or illness, maybe we found a good spouse, maybe we got through a rough financial time, etc. But we should not just remember it----we should follow the example of the man in today's gospel reading and go to church to give thanks to God.

SECOND--- This has to do with something the Lord told the man in verse 14 after the miracle took place----"See, you are well! Sin no more so nothing worse happens to you." The Bible is clear that sometimes illness is not due to any sin on our part---and also that sometimes illness is due to sin on our part. What Jesus Christ says here implies there was some sin involved in the cause of the man's paralysis. We have no idea of any details.

The Lord tells him to quit sinning or something worse might happen---good advice! If God helps us then we need to respond (like we hope the healed man did) by *quitting sinning*. And what a wonderful way that is to thank God for helping us---by obeying His commandments!

THIRD---After he was made well, the man let people know who had healed him. He wasn't shy about this answer to prayer. St. John tells us in verse 15—"The men went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him." He didn't just tell people---"I'm so happy that I am well now!" No, he told people *who* had made him well.

Let's say you have a serious illness----you pray about it, you go to a doctor, you take medicine, you have surgery. And you get well. It's fine to tell people about how the doctor was good and the medicine helped. But be sure to also tell people---"I prayed to Jesus Christ to get well. He answered my prayer and made me well." Give credit where credit is due!

Why is this important? Because it's true. And also, giving credit to Christ is a good way to

thank Him for helping you. And.....it's a good way to spread the good news about our Lord to other people. You may be a good influence on someone----that person may start himself to pray to the Lord! Be like the paralytic---give credit to where credit is due. Tell people what happened---that you prayed for help and that God helped you.

In conclusion---when God helps you, follow the paralytic's example---

1. Go to church to thank God. And keep going for the rest of your life.
2. Stop sinning.
3. Tell others who helped you---your Lord Jesus Christ.

You may have seen a bumper sticker that I occasionally have seen....it reads: "Have you thanked a plant today?" Well, plants are wonderful things, but I don't think they will hear you or care if you say "thank you" to them! A better bumper sticker would be—"Have you thanked God today?"

Always ask yourself—Has God helped me? Then, like the paralytic, thank Him and spread the news about what He did for you. Thanks be to our Lord Jesus Christ! He hears us and He helps us!