

“Jesus Heals a Disabled Man”

(John 5:1-15)

In a mobile society immobility is one of the most difficult challenges in life. While many disabled people today have found new freedom through improved accommodations to their needs, there are many others in the world who have little or no support to help them with their disabilities. Jesus encountered a disabled man who had no help and no hope. He was alone, incapacitated by some affliction, and doubtless forced to beg for his subsistence. Into this man’s life Jesus interjected hope, healing, and a renewed spiritual opportunity. When Jesus touches our lives, our lives will never be the same.

**Jesus knows our needs
even before we express them (5:1-7).**

Prayer isn’t so much a matter of informing God about our needs as it is informing ourselves about our dependence on Him. Jesus knows our needs, just as He knew the prevailing need of a disabled man near the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem.

After a period of ministry in Galilee, Jesus returned to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the Jewish feasts (5:1).

Having spent a considerable time in Galilee carrying on His ministry (as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels), Jesus returned to Jerusalem. He went there to attend “a feast of the Jews,” an unnamed feast that may have been the spring Feast of Passover, the fall Feast of Tabernacles, or one of several other major Jewish festivals.

Many sick people gathered at the Pool of Bethesda hoping to be healed, including a man who had been physically disabled for thirty-eight years (5:2-5).

John gives his readers some background to Jesus’ next miraculous sign, describing a certain pool in Jerusalem. This pool was located near the Sheep Gate, a gate that would have led into the sheep market. The name of the pool was Bethesda, which may mean House of Mercy or House of Outpouring. John described the pool as consisting of five covered colonnades, or porches. Archaeologists have uncovered this pool immediately north of the Temple Mount and have identified these five porches—a rectangular pool surrounded by four porches with a dividing porch in the middle.

The Pool of Bethesda was a gathering place for the sick. John says that many sick people gathered at the Pool of Bethesda—the blind, the disabled, and the paralyzed, to name a few. Apparently there was a tradition, really a superstition, that many Greek manuscripts include as a

part of John's description in this passage (though it may have been inserted later for clarity). According to this tradition, the sick were waiting for an angel of the Lord to come down from time to time and agitate the water in the pool. At that moment, the first person to enter the pool would be healed of any kind of illness.

The man who became the object of Jesus' attention that day was one of those helpless individuals whose only hope lay in the possibility of entering the pool at the right time in order to be healed. This man was unable to walk. He had endured this infirmity for thirty-eight years. For nearly four decades he'd wished for healing, and was willing to place his hope in a hopeless superstition.

Jesus asked the disabled man if he wanted to be healed (5:6).

As Jesus walked among the sick at the Pool of Bethesda, He took note of this disabled man lying on his mat near the pool. Jesus knew that the man had been disabled for a very long time—He knows our condition and cares for our needs. Jesus addressed the disabled man, asking, "Do you wish to become whole?" This was a perceptive question on Jesus' part. He wanted to test the man's will, to elevate the man to hope, to draw the man's attention away from superstition to a real solution.

The disabled man said that he had no one to help him into the presumably healing waters of the pool at the right time (5:7).

The disabled man explained to Jesus that he had no one to help him get into the pool when the waters were agitated and therefore others always entered ahead of him. This man was all alone. He had no one. He had no help. He had no hope. He needed Jesus. Jesus knew this man's condition and tested his heart. He knows our needs even before we express them.

**Jesus calls us to obey Him
even when it's difficult (5:8-13).**

Jesus was about to heal the disabled man, but the man would have to trust Jesus and obey a very difficult command—to "get up and walk."

Jesus commanded the disabled man to get up, pick up his mat, and walk (5:8).

The disabled man's helpless condition put him in the place of total dependence on Jesus. Jesus told this man, "Rise, pick up your mat, and walk!" For a man who hadn't walked in thirty-eight years, such a command was difficult if not impossible to comprehend.

Immediately the disabled man was healed and obeyed Jesus' command (5:9a).

At that instant—"immediately"—Jesus infused the disabled man with His healing power. The man became whole. His bones, his muscles, his ligaments, his tendons, his nerves that had been dormant for decades suddenly became alive and fully capable of supporting this man again. The man obeyed Jesus' unusual command, stood to his feet, picked up his mat, and began to walk. The atmosphere must have been electric. The man must have been ecstatic. The crowd must have been amazed at what had just taken place. When Jesus speaks, we must obey. When we obey, we see His power at work in our lives.

Because the man had been healed on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders reprimanded him for carrying his mat on that sacred day (5:9b-10).

The day on which this healing miracle took place, the third miraculous sign in John's Gospel, was a Sabbath. When the Jewish leaders saw the man who had been healed carrying his mat through the streets they rebuked him. They told him that it was a violation of the law for him to carry his mat on the Sabbath. As usual, these religious legalists were more concerned about their petty interpretation of the law than about the release from physical bondage of one of their fellow human beings.

The man informed the Jewish leaders that he was merely obeying the command of the one who had healed him (5:11).

When rebuked by the religious leaders, the man replied that the one who had healed him had also instructed him to take up his mat and walk. This man was simply and innocently obeying the one who had power to heal.

When asked who had healed him, the man was unable to answer because Jesus had withdrawn into the crowd (5:12-13).

The religious leaders asked who had healed the man, who had instructed him to take up his mat and walk in violation of Sabbath law. But the man didn't even know the name of the one who had healed him. Their conversation was brief, and Jesus had withdrawn into the crowd to avoid drawing attention. This man had simply obeyed Jesus. He'd obeyed a difficult command and experienced Jesus' healing power. We, too, must learn to obey Jesus no matter how difficult we perceive His will to be.

**Jesus challenges us to grow
even after we've been restored (5:14-15).**

Physical healing wasn't Jesus' highest priority for the disabled man. He wanted the man to become spiritually whole.

Jesus sought out the disabled man whom He'd healed and instructed him not to continue in sin (5:14).

Jesus kept an eye out for the disabled man, and found him in the Temple courts. There Jesus challenged the man's spiritual life. Having been restored physically, the disabled man now needed to grow spiritually. Jesus pointed out that the man had been restored to full health. He then said, "Don't sin anymore, so that something worse won't happen to you." Jesus never indicated that every illness is a direct result of sin. In fact, in John 9:3 He stated that sin wasn't the reason for a certain blind man's condition. But in the situation of the disabled man, his condition did seem to be connected to a sinful act on his part. Jesus warned him to change his way of thinking and living. The man now had a new opportunity at life.

The man went to tell the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him (5:15).

Having discovered the identity of the man who had healed him, the formerly disabled man went to the religious leaders. He told them that it was Jesus who had made him whole. This man likely reported this as good news—there seems to be nothing malicious in his report. He simply told those who had inquired that it was Jesus who had demonstrated this miraculous power in his life. When Jesus touches our lives, we'll want to tell others. When Jesus touches our lives, our lives will never be the same.