

## Jesus' Fourth Sign

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Signs / Sign; Johannine Sign; The Jews get angry with Jesus for healing on the Sabbath; Health and Healing / John 5:1-15

The fourth sign in John 5:1-15 teaches us that Jesus is the Son of God who makes people spiritually whole.

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## Introduction

Carolyn Weber has written a book that is titled, *Surprised by Oxford: A Memoir*.

Weber grew up in Canada and was awarded a graduate scholarship to study Romantic Literature at Oriel College of Oxford University in England.

She arrived at Oxford as a feminist from a loving but broken family, suspicious of men, and intellectually hostile to all things religious.

Her memoir chronicles her encounter with the Jesus of the Bible and her eventual conversion to him.

One of the chapters in her book is titled, "Signs, Signs, Everywhere Are Signs." She tells how one of the welcome events for new graduate students at Oriel College was a day trip to the famous Stonehenge monument.

Carolyn (or Caro, as she is known to everyone) was assigned to ride in a car with a British girl named Hannah. Hannah had grown up in India and was not very familiar with the British countryside.

They traveled for a long time. Realizing that they needed help, Caro and Hannah decided to ask a toothless farmer for directions to Stonehenge.

"Why, it's at least twenty kilometers back, love." He coughed as he pulled a pipe from his pocket. "Didn't you see the signs?" Then he added with a wink, "The countryside's covered in them" (Carolyn Weber, *Surprised by Oxford: A Memoir* [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2011], p. 38).

I enjoyed reading that section in her book because it reminded me of my struggle to read the road signs when I came to the United States from South Africa.

Some signs are universal. Other signs are local.

It is often hard to understand the local signs.

The Apostle John wrote *The Gospel According to John*. Jesus had done thousands of miracles. John selected just seven of these miracles, which he called “signs,” to help his readers “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing [they] may have life in his name” ([John 20:31](#)).

Each of the seven signs points to a different truth about Jesus.

The first sign was in [John 2:1-11](#), where Jesus turned the water into wine in Cana in Galilee. That sign showed that Jesus is the Christ who initiates the new covenant.

The second sign was in [John 2:12-17](#), where Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem. That sign showed that Jesus is the new temple.

The third sign was in [John 4:43-54](#), where Jesus healed the official’s son in Capernaum (although Jesus was in Cana in Galilee at the time of the healing). That sign showed that Jesus is the Son of God who grants life by the word of his power.

Today, we are going to look at Jesus’ fourth sign, the healing of the invalid.

## Scripture

Let’s read [John 5:1-15](#):

**<sup>1</sup> After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**

**<sup>2</sup> Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. <sup>3</sup> In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. <sup>5</sup> One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you**

want to be healed?”<sup>7</sup> The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.”<sup>8</sup> Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.”<sup>9</sup> And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

Now that day was the Sabbath.<sup>10</sup> So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.”<sup>11</sup> But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’”<sup>12</sup> They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’”<sup>13</sup> Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.<sup>14</sup> Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.”<sup>15</sup> The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.”

## Lesson

The fourth sign in [John 5:1-15](#) teaches us that Jesus is the Son of God who makes people spiritually whole.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. Jesus Went to Jerusalem (5:1)
2. Jesus Healed an Invalid (5:2-9a)
3. Jesus Provoked a Controversy (5:9b-15)

### I. Jesus Went to Jerusalem (5:1)

First, Jesus went to Jerusalem.

We read in verse 1, **“After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.”**

The words **“after this”** mark an unspecified period of time. It was John’s way of transitioning to the next incident in which he narrated the identity of the Son of God and Savior of the world (see [John 6:1](#) and 21:1).

John did not state which **“feast of the Jews”** Jesus attended on this occasion.

John repeatedly tied his narrative to one of the feasts of the Jews, such as Passover (2:13; 6:14; 11:55), Tabernacles (7:2), or Dedication (10:22). John selected signs that were tied to a particular feast to give a fuller meaning of that feast.

However, here in [John 5:1](#), we have the only instance in which John did not identify the feast of the Jews that Jesus attended in Jerusalem.

The Sinaiticus manuscript has an article before the word **“feast,”** possibly indicating that this feast was the feast of Tabernacles.

Jesus kept each of the three annual feasts: the feast of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (see [Exodus 34:22-23](#)).

Regardless of the particular feast, Jesus went to Jerusalem to celebrate it. And it was while he was in Jerusalem that we learn what happened next.

## II. Jesus Healed an Invalid (5:2-9a)

Second, Jesus healed an invalid.

Verse 2 states, **“Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades.”**

**The Sheep Gate** was a gate in the northern wall surrounding the temple compound. The pool was just outside this gate.

The pool was called in Aramaic **“Bethesda,”** which means “house of mercy.”

Sheep were brought to **the Sheep Gate** before they were sacrificed in the temple complex.

John went on to write about the five roofed colonnades in verse 3, **“In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.”**

You will notice that your Bible jumps from verse 3 to verse 5. The Byzantine text adds these words, “waiting for the moving of the water; for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred the water: whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had.”

These words are not recorded in the earliest Greek manuscripts.

One scholar writes, “This is indicated by poor external attestation and the presence of as many as seven non-Johannine words in this one sentence” (Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004], 195).

Therefore, most scholars do not believe that John wrote these words but they were added later by scribes.

However, verse 7 seems to suggest that the people believed that what was described in the Byzantine insertion took place.

John went on to write in verses 5-6, **“One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be healed?’ ”**

Of all the many people at the pool of Bethesda, this **“one man”** was the person Jesus singled out for his attention.

John included this account to show Jesus’ concern for an extreme case of disability.

Jesus asked the man if he wanted to be healed. The Greek word for **“healed”** (*hygies*) occurs 14 times in the New Testament and it means “having or indicating good health in body or mind; free from infirmity or disease.” The word can also be understood as “to be made whole.”

Jesus’ question was offering this **“one man”** hope and new life (see 4:10; 6:32-33).

**The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me” (5:7).**

The man held to the popular belief that whoever was able to get into the pool first after it had been stirred would be healed. But he had no friend to help him. He also had no money to pay someone to help him get into the pool first. This **sick man** was grumbling about his circumstances.

One commentator notes, “In terms of initiative, quick-wittedness, eager faith, and a questing mind, this invalid is the painful opposite of everything that characterizes the wonderful character in [John 9](#)” (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary [Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991], 243).

But, even though the invalid had a bad attitude, **Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk”** (5:8).

Jesus gave three commands: **“Get up,” “take up,”** and **“walk.”**

The **“bed”** was normally made of straw and was light enough that it could be rolled up and carried on the shoulder of an able-bodied person.

Verse 9a states, **“And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.”**

The disabled man was healed immediately.

He was able to do what Jesus commanded, namely, he got up, took up his bed, and walked off with it.

This demonstrates that he was healed so well that his atrophied muscles did not need time to strengthen. He was instantly able to do what an able-bodied man could do.

One commentator notes, “Just as the thirty-eight years prove the gravity of the disease, so the carrying of the bed and the walking prove the completeness of the cure” (Barrett C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and notes on the Greek Text* [SPCK, 21978], n.p.).

Ordinarily, Jesus healed people instantly and not in stages.

The dramatic change could not be attributed to a “natural” recovery. Rather, it had to be attributed to divine power.

### III. Jesus Provoked a Controversy (5:9b-15)

And third, Jesus provoked a controversy.

Verse 9b-10 states, **“Now that day was the Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, ‘It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.’ ”**

John mentioned that the healing took place on **the Sabbath**.

This set the stage for the controversy that was to follow. Jesus often did things on the Sabbath that caused controversy.

In this instance, the fourth of the Ten Commandments stipulated that no work should be done on the Sabbath ([Exodus 20:8-11](#)).

One commentator notes, “The assumption in Scripture seems to be that ‘work’ was one’s customary employment, but rabbinical opinion had developed oral tradition beyond the OT which stipulated 39 activities forbidden (Mishnah Shabbath 7:2; 10:5), including carrying anything from one domain to another. Thus, the man had broken oral tradition, not OT law” (John MacArthur Jr., ed., The MacArthur Study Bible, electronic ed. [Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997], 1587).

Astonishingly, the Jews had no words of appreciation for the healed man’s welfare. It was a bizarre silence!

The Jews rather chose to accuse Jesus indirectly through this man’s astonishing recovery.

The healed man’s flustered response to the Jews was, **“The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk’ ”** (5:11).

The man tried to take the heat off himself by saying that someone else told him to violate one of the thirty-nine prohibited categories of work stipulated in the oral tradition.

Dr. Wilbur M. Smith was a theologian who helped found Fuller Theological Seminary and also taught at my alma mater, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Dr. Smith studied under a Jewish professor named Dr. Joseph Klausner at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Dr. Smith said that he once asked Dr. Klausner if he would sign his autograph album, to which Dr. Klausner replied, “No, I am sorry; but it is the Sabbath.”

Dr. Smith did not know until he inquired that night that the Talmud asserts that writing two words in succession is work, and if a man even signs his name on the Sabbath he has broken the Law.

As students gathered in Dr. Klausner's study discussing one subject after another, Dr. Klausner would climb a little stepladder and bring down some heavy tome from his shelves, open it, point to some relevant passage, then return the book and soon take down another.

The Talmud says nothing about bringing down books from shelves as work—to write two words would be labor, but to develop perspiration by reaching up for volumes and vigorously discussing them is not work!

This is a perfect illustration of what Jesus meant when he talked about his Jewish contemporaries “holding the tradition of the elders” ([Mark 7:3](#)).

But, the Jewish leaders were not about to be put off so easily.

They asked the healed man, **“Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’”** (5:12).

The Jewish leaders were annoyed that someone would command another person to break their additions to the Law.

We read in verse 13, **“Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.”**

Then we read in verse 14, **“Afterward Jesus found him [that is, the man he had healed] in the temple and said to him, ‘See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.’”**

John did not say how much time had transpired from the time that Jesus healed the man to the time that Jesus found the man.

When Jesus found the man, he was in the temple complex, which was just a short distance from the pool of Bethesda.

Jesus affirmed that the man was now well.

He went on to exhort the man not to sin anymore so that nothing worse might happen to the man.

The Bible makes it clear that not all sickness is the result of sin (see 9:1-3; [Luke 13:1-5](#)).

Nevertheless, illness may be the result of one's sin (see [1 Corinthians 11:29-30](#); [James 5:15](#)).



Commentator D. A. Carson notes, “It is just possible John is also telling us that the reason Jesus chose this invalid out of all the others who were waiting for the waters to be stirred, was precisely because his illness, and his alone, was tied to a specific sin. If this interpretation is right, the syntax of *Stop sinning* is chosen to stress urgency. The *something worse* must be final judgment (cf. v. 29)” (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* [Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991], 246).

Jesus had healed the man physically. The man had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

One would think that the man would want to know everything about Jesus. One would think that the man would be eternally grateful to the one who had healed him after such a long paralysis.

But he did not. When confronted by the Jewish authorities, he quickly tried to take the heat off himself and put it on Jesus.

Jesus’ statement to the man was a warning to get his spiritual life right with God.

It is one thing to have one’s body healed. But eventually, that body will die.

It is far more important to have one’s soul healed. That soul will last for all eternity. That soul will spend eternity either in heaven or in hell. Jesus did not want something worse to happen to that man.

Verse 15 states, **“The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.”**

We don’t know his motive for telling the Jewish religious leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him.

He may have been cooperative with them because he did not want to get into trouble with them.

Or, he may have hoped that they might think more favorably toward Jesus.

However, John adds a note that tells his readers the reason for the hostility of the Jewish religious leaders. He said in verse 16, “And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.”

Jesus did not break God's law regarding the Sabbath since there was no prohibition in the word of God against doing good on that day (see [Mark 2:27](#)).

However, Jesus disregarded the oral law that the Jews had developed regarding Sabbath observance, and this is what upset the Jewish religious leaders.

So, they were "persecuting" Jesus. The word "persecuting" conveys the idea of repeated and ongoing hostile opposition toward Jesus that would eventually culminate in his crucifixion.

## Conclusion

The fourth sign in [John 5:1-15](#) teaches us that Jesus is the Son of God who makes people spiritually whole.

When people get seriously ill, they want to be healed physically. For some people, it becomes almost an obsession.

Once in a while, one hears of a remarkable recovery that a person makes. We give thanks to God for that healing.

However, one concern I have as a pastor is how few people have thoughts about their eternal souls.

This seems to have been Jesus' concern with the invalid he healed at the pool of Bethesda. When Jesus saw him later in the temple precincts, he said to him, **"See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."**

What worse thing could happen to him than being an invalid for thirty-eight years?

The worst thing could be to gain physical health and lose his soul.

The worst thing could be to be cut off from God for all eternity.

The worst thing could be to spend all eternity in hell.

Do you know that we are not told what happened to that man. I don't know if we will see him in heaven.

But I do know this: Jesus is the Son of God who makes people spiritually whole.

Jesus' power to heal bodies is a sign that he can heal souls as well.

So, if you have never done so before, I urge you right now to “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Amen.