

Title: **THE ANGEL**
THAT TROUBLES THE WATER

Text: John 5:1-16
Subject: *The Healing of the Impotent Man*
Date: Sunday Morning — January 18, 2009
Tape: John #38
Reading: *John 5:1-16*
Introduction:

One of the many great names by which God our Savior identifies himself is Jehovah-rophe, “*the LORD that healeth thee.*” After God had so graciously delivered the children of Israel across the Red Sea, miraculously opening a path for them in the sea and then drowning Pharaoh and the armies of Egypt in the depths of the sea, he brought Israel into the wilderness of Shur, where for three days they wandered without water. The scorching sun beat down upon them. The desert sands scalded their feet. Their cattle were perishing. Their children’s tongues were swollen. And their lips were parched. They had roamed for three days in the barren wilderness without water. Then, at last, they came to the plentiful fountains of Marah. When they saw the waters of Marah, how their hearts must have rejoiced in hope and expectation. As they approached Marah, they could almost taste the water. They could almost feel the cool, refreshing water in their mouths. But when they got there, the waters were bitter and they could not drink them! Can you imagine the frustration and disappointment these men and women must have felt?

Immediately, they turned upon Moses, and began to murmur and complain. Actually, they turned upon the Lord God who had brought them to this place! Though the Lord had led them by the fiery and cloudy pillar, though he was with them, though He had miraculously and graciously delivered them from the bondage of Egypt and promised to do them good, they could not see Him! All they could see, all they could think about were the bitter waters before them and the thirst within them. Because they saw nothing good in God’s providence, they despised his providence.

Do you know anyone like them? If we are honest, I am afraid, we all must see ourselves in those grumbling people! When they should have remembered God’s goodness, they thought only of their troubles. When they should have looked to their merciful Deliverer, they looked only upon Marah’s bitter waters. When they should have prayed, they murmured.

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When they should have believed, they grumbled. — *“But God, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not...For he remembered that they were but flesh”* (Psalm 78:38-39).

Remember, it was God who brought Israel to Marah. He brought them here to teach them and to make himself known to them. And he did it to teach us and make himself known to us. — *“All these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition”* (1 Corinthians 10:11). We read, in Exodus 15:25 and 26, that Moses *“cried unto the LORD; and the LORD showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, And said, if thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.”*

If you will turn with me to John 5, you will see another pool of water, a pool called Bethesda, which means, “house of mercy.” To this pool Johovah-rophe, Jehovah our Healer, came to perform one of his great, memorable acts of mercy upon a poor, impotent sinner, he saw laying by the pool.

(John 5:1-16) “After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. (2) Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. (3) In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. (4) For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. (5) And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. (6) When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time *in that case*, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? (7) The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. (8) Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. (9) And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.

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(10) The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry *thy* bed. (11) He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. (12) Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk? (13) And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in *that* place. (14) Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. (15) The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole. (16) And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.”

When I read this story, I feel like Moses when saw the Lord in the burning bush, and said, “*I will now turn aside and see this great sight.*” May God the Holy Spirit be our Teacher, as I try to preach to you from this portion of Holy Scripture about **THE ANGEL THAT TROUBLES THE WATER**. — That’s the title of my message:— **THE ANGEL THAT TROUBLES THE WATER**. As with all our Lord’s miracles. Everything in this story is highly significant. Everything written here is designed of God to teach us spiritual things relating to Christ, the gospel of God’s free grace and our salvation in and by him.

SIX THINGS

THE HEALING POOL

The first thing that demands our attention is the healing pool that is described for us by God the Holy Spirit. We are told in verse 1 that our lord Jesus had gone up to Jerusalem to keep one of the annual feasts of the Jews.

- The Feast of Tabernacles
- The Feast of Pentecost
- The Feast of Passover

We are not told which feast this was, because that is not important. Our blessed Savior went up to Jerusalem in compliance with the law of Moses, because he had come to obey, fulfil and finish the law as our covenant Surety and Representative.

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In Jerusalem, near the sheep gate, here called “*the sheep market*,” there was a pool with five porches, called Bethesda. This Pool of Bethesda was near the brook Cedron, which ran by Gethsemane (John 18:1). This sheep gate was sanctified in the days of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 3:1, 32; 12:39), and is mentioned by Jeremiah as a place of significance in Jeremiah 31 (vv. 38-39). Right by this sheep gate, or sheep fold, stood the Pool of Bethesda.

The name of this pool, “*Bethesda*,” means “house of mercy,” or “house of grace.” Apparently, it was given this name because many had been healed of their infirmities by its waters when “*an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water.*”

- Many suggest that John was simply relating a Jewish superstition. The Jews gradually became more and more superstitious, as they became wrapped up in carnal ordinances of outward religious ceremony and ignored the message of those ceremonies and the instruction of God’s Word. They actually believed that the blood of their sacrifices mixed with the water of Bethesda’s pool gave the waters miraculous, healing power.
- Others attempt to destroy the faith of Christ by trying to prove that the waters had certain minerals in them that gave them some healing efficacy.
- But the Spirit of God inspired John to write as he did, telling us both of this Pool of Bethesda and the angel that troubled the water, making its waters effectual for healing at specific times.

What does this Pool of Bethesda represent? Remember, the name “*Bethesda*” means “*house of mercy*.” Without question, it is symbolic of something connected with the mercy, grace and goodness of God bestowed upon sinners in the saving operations of his grace.

Perhaps the Pool of Bethesda refers to God’s appointed means of grace, the divinely appointed means he uses to save his elect: — The Worship of God and the Preaching of the Gospel in His House.

- Here, in the House of God, the free, sovereign, rich, and abundant grace and mercy of God in, by and through Christ, is proclaimed, as the only ground and foundation of a sinner’s hope.
- Here, in the house of God, the mercy of God, as it is displayed in the covenant of grace, in the mission of Christ, and redemption accomplished by him is preached.

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- Here, in the House of Mercy, the mercy of God in redemption, regeneration and in the forgiveness of sin is published abroad to sinners.
- Here, indeed, in the House of Grace, the whole of salvation, from first to last, is held forth for the relief of poor, helpless souls.

Whether the Pool of Bethesda has reference to the place of divine worship, I do not know. But, if you will turn back to **Zechariah 13:1**, you will see a fountain to which it most definitely does have reference: — I mean **the fountain of Christ's precious blood**, opened for polluted sinners, the fountain in which we are washed and cleansed from all sin!

(Zechariah 13:1) “In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.”

This fountain cures all diseases. It is opened in the house of mercy by the preaching of the gospel. **The gospel itself** is compared to a fountain of waters (Isaiah 4:1; Zechariah 14:8; Joel 3:18).

(Isaiah 4:1) “And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach.”

(Joel 3:18) “And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the LORD, and shall water the valley of Shittim.”

(Zechariah 14:8) “And it shall be in that day, *that* living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be.”

It is not insignificant that this Pool of Bethesda was by the Sheep Gate, or the Sheep Fold that the Lord God had sanctified. This much is certain: — Christ's wherever sheep are found: — Those the Father has given him, — Those sheep for whom he died, — Those sheep must bring in, wherever they are found, there he sends his Word, and by his Word he gathers them in and heals them (Psalm 107:20).

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(Psalms 107:20) “He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered *them* from their destructions.”

One more thing here: — The Spirit of God tells us that there were **five porches**, five large, covered porches adjoined to and surrounding the Pool of Bethesda. John Gill suggested that these five porches might be intended to refer to the law, the five books of the law written by Moses, telling us that there is no grace, no mercy, and no salvation in the works of the law. If you would be saved, you must get off the hard, cold slab of death in the law and into the living waters of grace in Christ!

(Romans 9:30-33) “What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. (31) But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. (32) Wherefore? Because *they sought it* not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; (33) As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.”

(Romans 10:1-4) “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. (2) For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. (3) For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. (4) For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”

(Galatians 2:16) “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

(Galatians 2:21) “I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”

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(Galatians 3:21) “Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.”

(Galatians 5:1-4) “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. (2) Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. (3) For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. (4) Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.”

THE IMPOTENT MULTITUDE

Second, the impotent multitude laying on those five porches, waiting for the moving of the water, vividly portray poor, lost sinners in the house of God (v. 3).

(John 5:3) “In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.”

Notice the words used by the Spirit of God to describe our last and ruined condition, since the sin and fall of our father Adam.

“IMPOTENT” — That is a pretty good way to describe fallen man. He is impotent before the law. Enfeebled by sin, man can do nothing to save himself. We are, by nature, impotent, as impotent as any dead man in the grave. He has neither the power to redeem himself, nor to regenerate himself, nor even to choose to be redeemed and regenerated.

“BLIND” — Fallen man, dead in trespasses and in sins, is as blind as he is impotent. He is ignorant of, and blind to everything that is spiritual: — Himself, — God, — His Son, — His Righteousness, — His Grace, — His Salvation.

“HALT” — As the sinner is impotent and blind, he is also “halt,” lame on both his feet. This word, “halt” (lame), is used in reference people hesitating about the things of God, halting between two opinions. It is sometimes used to speak of the infirmities of God’s saints, and our falterings and failures in spiritual matters. It refers to the incapacity man

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walk. — We cannot come to Christ for grace and life. We cannot walk by faith in him, except God himself turn us, and draw us, and bring us!

“WITHERED” — The word means “dried up!” That’s us! — Dried up! What a pitiful looking crowd that must have been! There is one with an arm all twisted and dried up. There is another whose legs are withered. There is one who looks as if there is no moisture left in his muscles, or in his body at all. Destitute of grace and destitute of hope, without God, without Christ, you are withered, dried up!

“WAITING” — These poor souls, impotent, blind, halt, and withered were waiting for the moving of the water. They were laying there because someone had informed them that on certain, specific days, God sent an angel from heaven to move the water in that pool, and that the first person in the water as it as stirred by the angel would be healed. — There they lay, waiting at Wisdom’s gates, watching at the posts of her doors!

THE ANGEL THAT TROUBLED

Now, third, look with me at this Angel that troubled the water. I cannot speak with certainty about this, because the Scriptures do not; but it appears that the Pool of Bethesda was a standing miracle in Jerusalem. It was specifically intended, by the grace of God, to be a standing witness to his mercy during their dark days of silence, between Malachi and the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, those silent years in which the Lord removed the Spirit of prophecy, when Urim and Thummim were not and the Shekinah was not seen in his house.

The Pool of Bethesda was a standing witness that the Lord *“had not cast away his people whom he foreknew.”* Therefore, the impotent folk: blind, halt and withered, were brought here to wait for the angel of God to trouble the water, just as poor sinners were taught of God to wait for Christ. As our blessed Lord Jesus was the fountain to be opened in that day to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and uncleanness, the pool of Bethesda shadowed forth his coming.

When the Son of God came here and performed the miracle of mercy recorded upon this page of Holy Scripture, and performed it without the use of Bethesda’s waters, he said to the man, to the multitude who waited for the angel to trouble the water, and to the Pharisees who stood by, — “I am

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the Fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. I am the Water of Life. And I am the Angel that Heals. My name is Johovah-rophe. *I am the Lord that healeth thee! In this day of mercy the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound*” (Exodus 15:26; Isaiah 30:26). And now, since he has come of whom the Pool gave witness, since the Substance has appeared, the shadow has been taken away. Never again do we hear or read any mention of the Pool of Bethesda and its healing waters.

Yet, there is **a striking parallel** between the Pool of Bethesda and the ministry of the Word in the House of God. Gospel churches are the Bethesdas, Houses of Mercy, of this gospel day. But, as in the story before us, we must wait for the decent of the Angel of God, Christ the almighty Angel of the Covenant, to give healing power and saving efficacy to the gospel we preach, the water of the Word.

There was **a certain season** when the angel went down and troubled the water in Bethesda’s pool.

- Some suggest that it was during the divinely appointed feasts days in Jerusalem
- Others suggest that it was on the sabbath, the divinely appointed day of worship.

Whatever the case may have been, there are certain seasons when the Angel of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, comes to our Gospel Bethesdas to trouble the water.

- At the appointed hour of public worship, wherever two or three are gathered together in his name, Christ comes to stir the water.
- At the appointed time of love, when the chosen, redeemed sinner must be called, the Angel of the Coven comes to bring all the blessings of the Covenant to his chosen.

The troubling (stirring, agitation, shaking) of the water speaks of the Lord Jesus pouring out his Spirit upon us in the house of God, causing his Word to run swiftly, to go forth to the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners in saving power and efficacy. The Angel who troubles the water is the One who heals the needy soul, Christ our Savior!

“The Spirit of God, who moved upon the face of the waters in the first creation, in and by the ministry of the word, troubles the minds of men. And whilst the prophet prophesies, (He) causes a shaking

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among the dry bones, which is done at certain seasons; for as there are certain seasons for the preaching of the Gospel, so there is more especially a fixed, settled, and appointed one, for the conversion of God's elect; who are called according to purpose, and at the time the Lord has appointed. And whoever now, upon the preaching of the Gospel, are enabled to step forth and come to Christ, and believe in him, are cured of all their soul maladies and diseases, be they what they will; all their inquiries are pardoned, their persons justified, and they are saved in Christ, with an everlasting salvation. And as this cure was not owing to any natural virtue in the water, nor even to the angels troubling it, but to a supernatural power; so the conversion of a sinner is owing not to ministers, and to the word and ordinances as administered by them, but to the superior power of the grace of God; and which is exerted in his time, and on whom he pleases.”

John Gill

But there are **two very great differences** between the Pool of Bethesda and our Gospel Bethesdas. — Here is great our mercy:

1. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed in this house is not limited to one poor, impotent soul. The Gospel invitation is issued to all who will hear his voice; and he assures all who come to him, “*him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out!*”
2. And the salvation of God does not wait for you to step into the Water of Grace. He who is God's salvation comes to poor, impotent sinners, blind, halt and withered. He binds up your wounds and pours in the oil of his Spirit and the wine of his grace, and makes the impotent whole.

THE PATIENT HEALED

Christ is the great Physician, the Angel that troubles the water. Now, in the fourth place, I want you to see the poor patient he healed, the impotent man, blind, halt and withered.

1. He was impotent; and he had been that way for a long, long time (38 years).
2. He was a certain man, sovereignly chosen, distinctly elected.
3. He was under the watchful eye of the Son of God. — “*Jesus saw him!*”
4. He had no ability of his own and had no one to help him.
5. He was effectually called. — “*Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.*” That is a command. And with the command came the power to obey.

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(John 5:5-9) “And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. (6) When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time *in that case*, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? (7) The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. (8) Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. (9) And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.”

THE DAY OF HEALING

Fifth, we are told that the day of this man’s healing was the sabbath day. How often do we read of our Lord performing works of mercy and healing needy souls on the sabbath day.

- Corn and the Man with a Withered Hand (Matthew 12:1-12)
- The Woman with a Spirit of Infirmity for 18 Years (Luke 13:11-12)
- The Man with the Dropsy (Luke 14:1-4).
- The Man Born Blind (John 9:1-16)

The sabbath day is the day Christ gives you rest...

- from your sin,
- from your curse,
- and from your labor.

SIN NO MORE

It would be irresponsible of me to send you home without answering the question that immediately popped into your mind when we read our text.

(John 5:10-16) “The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry *thy* bed. (11) He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. (12) Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk? (13) And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in *that* place. (14) Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. (15) The man

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departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole. (16) And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.”

So here’s the sixth thing. — What did our Savior mean when he said to this man he had healed, “*Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*” He assured him that he was, one time, with finality made whole. Then he said, “*sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*”

- Did the Master mean to imply that if he sinned again he might be made unwhole again? — No.
- Did the Lord Jesus mean by this that saved sinners might lose their salvation, if they do not live right? — Of course not!
- Did the Savior here imply that it is possible for us to live in this world without sinning? — You know better!

What do these words mean? — “*Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*” Read the command like this — “Cease from sin, lest a worse thing come upon you,” and turn to 1 Peter 4, where we see exactly what our Lord meant.

(1 Peter 4:1-4) “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; (2) That he no longer should live the rest of *his* time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. (3) For the time past of *our* life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: (4) Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with *them* to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of *you.*”

If the Lord Jesus has made you whole, he has redeemed you by the sacrifice of himself. He bore your sin in his own body on the tree as your Substitute. When he did, he died to sin, and you died in him! Now, you must reckon yourself dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God by Christ, in Christ and with Christ. Cease from sin! Trusting Christ live in freedom: free from guilt, free from fear, free from the world. And live unto him that died for you and rose again! Live unto God, to the will of God and the glory of God, ever looking to Christ, living in the sweet and blessed “*joy of faith.*”

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“Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.” — God’s grace and God’s salvation are not bestowed by our merit and cannot be destroyed by our demerit! Yet, we can bring much sorrow upon ourselves by reverting to a sense of guilt, living in the apprehension of death. Though you cannot forfeit God’s grace by something you do, you may bring upon yourself something much worse than any impotence of the body. Though you cannot, when justified freely by his grace, lose God’s favor, you may bring yourself under great sorrow of heart by wilful sin, causing the Lord God to hide his face from you. When the arrows of the Almighty are in you and the terrors of God set themselves in array against you (Job 6:4), that is far worse than any calamity of the body (Psalm 32:3-4; 51:4-12; 88:9, 12, 14-18).

(Psalms 32:3-4) “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. (4) For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.”

(Psalms 51:4-12) “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest. (5) Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. (6) Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden *part* thou shalt make me to know wisdom. (7) Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (8) Make me to hear joy and gladness; *that* the bones *which* thou hast broken may rejoice. (9) Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. (10) Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. (11) Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. (12) Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me *with thy* free spirit.”

(Psalms 88:9) “Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: LORD, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee.”

(Psalms 88:12) “Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?”

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(Psalms 88:14-18) “LORD, why castest thou off my soul? *why* hidest thou thy face from me? (15) I *am* afflicted and ready to die from *my* youth up: *while* I suffer thy terrors I am distracted. (16) Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off. (17) They came round about me daily like water; they compassed me about together. (18) Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, *and* mine acquaintance into darkness.”

Has the Savior made you whole? If he has, “Cease from sin and live unto God by him.”

(Romans 12:1-2) “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. (2) And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

Amen.