

Bethesda the House of Grace

A sermon delivered by

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Turn to the fifth chapter of the Gospel of John if you will. I want to read just a few verses. The Gospel of John chapter five; I'll begin reading at verse two.

It's good to hear those Bible pages turning.

Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. 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. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. 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? 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. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.^a

I want us to look at these few Scriptures for a little while. And I've discovered a few things recently in studying the Word of God – some very important things. In John chapter three we see Jesus talking to what we call an important sinner. Nicodemus was a great religious man; probably the most respected man in the day that Jesus lived. That's the reason I'm calling him an important sinner. In other words, sometimes forget those – the up and outers. He was well-known, respected, and probably rich. He had every thing this world has to offer but he, too, needed to be born again.

In John four you'll find a picture of an immoral sinner. She had had five husbands; sleeping with a man that wasn't her husband, but yet she needed the Messiah also. And Jesus told her about the Water of Life.

^a John 5:2-9

In John chapter five – which I’ve just read – you find the impotent sinner. He was sick and was in what was about like a rest home I suppose. And it had five porches. Now, you notice this place was called Bethesda. If I were to take a title tonight it would be *Bethesda the House of Grace*.

The prefix words with Beth- always means house. Beth-el is house of God. Beth-lehem is the house of bread. Beth-any is the house of the figs. And Beth-esda: the house of grace for goodness. Now I’ve been studying a little bit lately about numbers. There is an important thing here to note. And that is that in chapter five where you read about the house of grace. Chapter five is the number for grace. In God’s mathematical formula that is about grace. And I believe numbers are important. I believe the reason this is chapter five is because it’s the number of grace. You’ll notice it had five porches; which, again, is the number of grace.

You say, “I don’t believe in numbers.”

Then you had better start reading another book. This one is full of them. I believe God believes in numbers. And when we look at this I could mention many things about the number five meaning grace. The first five books of the Bible are called the Pentateuch. It’s separate and apart from every other part of the Word of God – written by Moses. The five offerings that they offered up under the law; there were five of them: the burnt offering, peace offering, sin offering, trespass and meat offerings.

I believe there are five important studies on this doctrine of grace. I believe it’s a saving grace, a growing grace, a teaching grace, a suffering grace and a dying grace.

There are five ministries God gave to the Church: the Apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and the teachers.

David had five stones when he went to face the giant.

There were five wise and five foolish virgins.

There were five thousand men fed with five small loaves.

Isaiah had five names for God: he’s Wonderful, Counsellor, the Almighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace.

Noah’s name is found the fifth time in Genesis chapter six, verse eight and it says this:

Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.^b

I know that coming out of Egypt there were 603,550 came out of Egypt. I know that because the Bible tells me that. I believe there were 601,750 soldiers as they crossed Jordan because the Bible tells me that. Right now in Jerusalem they are fighting over the land.

^b Genesis 6:8

God says, “It’s my land and I’m going to give it to Israel.” And they’re still fighting about it. But they’re going to give it one day because God said so in his book. Thank God – I’m glad tonight. This preacher still preaches on the blood. The Bible tells us:

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.^c

There is forgiveness tonight in this book. There’s forgiveness tonight in the blood and even the Bible tells us that we are to pray that God will forgive us as we forgive others.

I’ve had folks say, “Preacher, I can forgive – I just can’t forget.”

God expects you also to forget because God forgets. If you don’t remember another thing I say tonight remember these six words: God always remembers to forget and forgets to remember. Did you hear what I said? God remembers always to forget and forgets to remember.

When we stand before him he’s going to say, “I don’t remember those sins.”

It’s a good place to be tonight. Let’s look at the pool for just a moment.

First of all, there were great multitudes. Let’s get back to that five for a moment. Jesus spoke five words in a question to this man.

Wilt thou be made whole?^d

“Lord, I’d like to be, but I have no one to put me into the pool.”

The Bible said there was a great multitude there – a great multitude. They were impotent, they were blind, they were halt, they were withered, and they were weak – five conditions.

There are multitudes tonight that are lost without God and know nothing about this book. We could look and preach to that multitude with all those diseases for the entire time, but I want to move ahead.

Not only do we see here the multitude. I want us to look at this man. He had an infirmity for thirty-eight years. For thirty-eight years he was trusting in himself; hoping he could find a way. Every time the water was troubled he was too late getting there; someone else was healed in place of him. Try over and over again – he didn’t have the strength to do anything about his condition. Then when he trusted others, others failed him. They didn’t help him.

He said, “I have no one to help me. Someone beat me into the pool.”

^c 1 John 1:7-9

^d John 5:6

You can trust yourself and trust others and die and go to Hell. But I'm glad that day Jesus came by. I want to show you something I ran across. I believe every miracle Jesus did in the New Testament had a greater picture and a greater vision involved than what was happening then and there at that place. Because the Bible says:

The world itself could not contain the books that should be written.^e

But these are written...that believing ye might have life through his name.^f

What does this thirty-eight years represent? I tell you what it represents: the Law.

You say, "Well, how's that?"

Well, for thirty-eight years....

You say, "Well, no preacher that's forty years."

No. It's thirty-eight years. They wandered in the wilderness for forty years but they wandered aimlessly in the wilderness for thirty-eight years.

You say, "Can you prove that, preacher?"

Certainly: Deuteronomy chapter two, verses thirteen and fourteen:

Now rise up, said I, and get you over the brook Zered. And we went over the brook Zered. 14 And the space in which we came from Kadeshbarnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among [them].^g

Why? This is an exact picture of Israel.

God had told the Israelites, "I'm going to give you land that's full of milk and honey. I'm going to give you a leader that will lead you and take you where you want to go." And God said, "I'm going to go before you in a pillar of cloud in the day and a pillar fire by night. I'm going to show you the way there. And I'm going to give it to you and you're going to possess it because it's your land and I'm giving it to you."

That still holds today. That law yet has never been broken. God is still planning to give Israel the land and one day they will have it. Thank God I'll live with them that day in that New Jerusalem and that new Earth forever and forever.

But for thirty-eight years this man had lain at the pool and he was sick and he couldn't do anything about it; for thirty-eight years.

^e John 21:25

^f John 20:31

^g Deuteronomy 2:13,14

You know God said, “I’ll give you the land. It’s a promise to you.” And God said, “I’ll give it to you.”

But you know when they went to spy out the land they said, “It’s just like God said it was.”

He sent a member from the twelve tribes: one from each tribe. And they came back and they gave the report. They had two reports: the majority report and the minority report.

The majority report said, “Well, it’s just like God said it was but there’s some problems over there.”

Well, you know there’s a great difference tonight in having the promise of something and possessing it. I’m talking about the promise and the possession. You see, you can be promised something on conditions – and there were conditions. They had to go in to the land and trust God with it all.

So they came back and they said, “We cannot possess it. God said he would give it to us but we found some things that are not too good. First of all there are giants in the land. Man, we’re no match for those giants – they’re everywhere. And the number of us – we’re like grasshoppers in their sight.

“Now, true there’s a lot of fruit and there’s a lot of things and abundance in the land – it took two of us to carry one cluster of grapes” – but the problem was the grapes and the grasshoppers and the giants.

The spies report – ten of them said, “We can’t take it.”

Two of them said, “We can take it. True, there are giants there, but God will help us fight the giants. True that we may be as grasshoppers in their sight, but if God fights the battle we’re promised the victory and that’s what we need to look to.”

But these two men were scorned over their report and they went the way of the majority. I want to tell you tonight, friends, the way of the majority is on the wrong road and it’s leading to destruction. And it’s a wide gate. But there’s many going in thereat. And if you want to be a soldier for the cross tonight you might as well realize in the very beginning that you’re going to be in minority.

I’d rather be in the minority with Jesus than in the majority without him.

And he said, “For this reason you’re going to wander aimlessly in this wilderness for thirty-eight more years.”

The spies brought the report and God was displeased because it was in unbelief. God had promised it and they failed to accept it. And for all of those years God allowed them to die one by one. God perished them from this Earth – an entire generation from twenty years up. All but two men died somewhere in the wilderness.

Now, remember I said this has to do with the Law. This was still under the Law. And that takes us somewhere else. God finally gets to the place where they finally get to Jordan. After wandering – going in circles – for thirty-eight years God took Moses on a little trip. They walked up a mountain called Nebo. I’ve seen – I’ve been there in the mountain of Nebo up in Pisgah.

God said to Moses, “This is as far as you’re going to go. You disobeyed me, too. But you’ve been a great leader. And I could understand that. But I can’t allow you – a representative of the law – to take the children over into Israel – over into the Promised Land. First of all, you disobeyed me.”

Moses – the meekest man in the world – lost that part of his gift through anger. You know you’re always weakest in your strongest part in the flesh. Where you are strongest in the flesh you will be the weakest spiritually. You think on that. Gnaw on that for a while and you’ll see what I’m talking about.

He said, “Moses, I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. I’m going to let you see the land that I promised Abraham and I confirmed through Isaac and Jacob. And I’ve made you the great deliverer to bring my people back out of bondage.”

And I believe it was a clear day that day. I believe it was a transparent day that day. Moses was going to see a day like he had never seen before. He was going to get a vision on the mountain. Now, he had to walk up the mountain first of all. If you get a kind of vision God wants to give you sometimes you’ll have to rise above the level of this world. If you’re going to get in tune with God and commune with God you’re going to have to get above this world; above your circumstances; above your trials; above the labors. God can put you in that place. God help us in these last days to give us young preachers and give us men that will stand with a vision. I’m not so concerned about your resume. I’m not too concerned about your degrees. But I’m concerned – if you say you’re a preacher – about your vision. We need a vision of the lost like we’ve never had. I’ve consumed a life time in trying to preach to lost people. And it’s sometimes aggravates me to see how unconcerned preachers can be about a lost world around them. I want to tell you this is serious business.

God said, “Moses, I want you to take a look. I’m going to show you all the land.”

That’s right. It was a clear day and Moses had 20/20 vision. Even better than that he had eyes that... He had eyes that had never dimmed one bit. And I believe on this day God gave him special vision. He gave him the eye of an eagle. And he begins to look.

And he said, “Moses way up yonder as far as you can see. That huge mountain with the snow on top of it: that’s Mt. Hermon. And that’s the end and the extent of the Promised Land. It reaches all the way.”

You say, “You think Moses could see all that?”

I say, “Sure I do.”

Check the dictionary. It will tell you right off. You can stand at the Dead Sea – if you could see high enough – and you could because Nebo put him up there – and see Mount Hermon on a clear day. You talk about seeing seven states from Rock City or wherever it is in Tennessee. I’ve never seen that but I’ve stood on Nebo and I know what you can see from there. All those that look at it. That’s a great mountain that produces a stream.

“And, Moses, do you see that little gem. You can just barely about see it in that cluster of green. It looks like a gem on green velvet? That’s the Sea of Galilee. That little river running from it is Jordan’s

River. And, Moses, all of this land – look over into Gilead; and look over into Dan; and all the other places: into Naphtali and into Ephraim and Manasseh and all the other places. And, Moses, look real close. Do you see that mountain range that is only about fifty miles away? That’s called Mt. Moriah. And, Moses, that’s where Abraham offered up Isaac. You know about that. You wrote about that as I gave you the Word. That’s where he was going to offer him as an offering. But you know God intervened. And, Moses, I want to tell you something else. That little hill that goes out from that is called Mt. Calvary and that’s the place, Moses. You don’t know about it now but one day the type of person you’ve been showing the people as you write the Word of God – one day he is going to hang on a cross. Thank God. And when he hangs on that cross the sin-debt will be paid for the entire world.”

Whoa. Praise his name! Hallelujah to God!

But you see Moses couldn’t take his people over. He represents the law. Did you know the Law never saved anybody? It never has. It never will. Why is the Law so important? It’s really important. It takes the Law to impute sin. You see where there is no Law there is no sin.

So he was teaching a people his holiness and what we need to strive to be. And we can’t do it in ourselves, but he made it possible we can be born again and with his Spirit inside we can overcome even this world.

One thing I didn’t say about Moses. The next step Moses was going to make after he saw the land was to die. Now, if you’re going to get a vision from the mountain you’re going to have to die: die of your pride; die of your arrogance. What do you say, preacher? Paul calls it crucifying yourself.

You see:

The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.^h

James said:

Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.ⁱ

Galatians tells us:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.^j

Righteousness came not by the Law, but God gave us a Spirit to lead us and the ability to mortify and to kill this body – thank God – and live for him. Let the Spirit breath in our lives.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh,

^h John 1:17

ⁱ James 2:10

^j Galatians 4:4,5

and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.^k

I say, “Glory, glory, glory, Hallelujah!”

Praise the Lord.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. ^l

The Law couldn't get us over. But the next thing: we see the multitudes; we see the man with the infirmity. But we also see the Messiah.

He's preeminent in all three of these places: when he meets Nicodemus; when he meets the Samaritan – you know, she was looking for the Messiah:

When he is come, he will tell us all things.^m

The woman of Samaria – when she met Jesus – she first called him a Jew. Then she called him, “sir.” Then she called him a prophet. Then she mentioned the Messiah was coming and when he was come she would know everything. And when he gave her that drink of water as she had forgotten her water pot and went back into the city praising God and saying, “Is not this the Messiah?”

Is not this the Christ?ⁿ

Oh, I believe that's him. I know it's him. Praise the Lord.

He'll give you a drink of water tonight that you'll never thirst again. Glory to his name!

God took out his gold pick and shovel, made a grave somewhere there in Nebo, and buried his servant Moses.

He said, “Joshua, now it's your time.”

Let me mention the Law for this thirty-eight years this man is looking to was helpless. But thank God the one that was standing over him and said:

Wilt thou be made whole?^o

His name is Jesus.

^k Romans 8:1-4

^l Ephesians 2:8

^m John 4:25

ⁿ John 4:29

^o John 5:6

What does the name Jesus mean? In the Old Testament it's usually translated: Joshua. Moses was the law giver but Joshua is a picture of Christ. His name is Jesus in the New Testament.

Joshua said, "Get ready, folks. I've been talking to God. He said as he had been with Moses he is going to be with me. And I want you to get ready."

And he told them how to get prepared; how to sanctify themselves; how to get ready for the march. They were going over to victory.

What did I say a moment ago? This man's lying here and he says, "The reason I can't get saved is because whenever the angel moves the water somebody beats me in." Oh, thank God Moses. We need somebody to move the water. Glory to God I'm glad the right one came that day and he wasn't going to have to trust the moving of the water. He had the one there to do it: Joshua could move the water. Glory to his name.

When they came to the banks of Jordan it just separated. I like what the Bible says that he just piled up the water; just cut it off and all of it Dead Sea was dry. And they piled it up all the way back to Adam. They just kept piling it up.

I'm talking about moving the water. Moses couldn't move the water but Joshua could. You see the picture. When they went into the water; when they got in the middle of it they built a memorial with twelve stones. The water was out of the banks. Some of you have traveled the Holy Land enough to know that in that area of Jordan that the main water level and where the river usually stays it's a small stream. But when it floods over its banks it can be up to fourteen miles wide. And I don't know how high it was the day they went across it. It doesn't matter. But God just piled up the water all the way back to Adam.

When we talk about Jordan we're talking about death and judgment. I thank God judgment is upon every man from Adam to the present race for the present day. And it's through Adams' fall we come into this world as sinners. But thank God he sent a second Adam and that Adam met the Devil on every fighting battle field and he won every time. And he's still winning today. Let the Devil say what he is. Let him say what he will. But thank God there's a better day coming for God's people because we have the victory. Praise the Lord.

The water piles up all the way to Adam. Death speaks of Jordan – the Dead Sea – that's just what it is. Did you ever see anything living in that sea when you were there? It's as dead as dead can be. Thank God one of these days you'll read that I'm dead. Don't you believe a word of it. That's just this old body. But thank God we can have something tonight when we're born again and the Spirit of God moves in we can have something inside that will never die. Praise his name. I'm never going to die. A million years from now I'll be kicking up gold dust in the city of God where I'll be alive forever and forever.

I can't help but get excited.

He'll give you dying grace.

Joshua took them into the river. They come out on the other side. They built a memorial in the middle of Jordan so the people in the families to come would know they crossed Jordan right there. When it was down you could see the memorial. They put another one on the bank proving they had crossed the river right there.

God will give you dying grace.

I'm going to close with an illustration. Probably some of you have read it and know it and heard it. It's an old one. Anything I've got is old. I simply call it dying grace.

It goes all the way back to the Civil War – the Battle of Gettysburg. There was a boy named Charlie Colson. He wanted to get in the army but he was too young. He was just seventeen so he couldn't get in as a soldier. But he enlisted as a drummer and they allowed him to come in at that age. He was in the heat of that battle at Gettysburg and he got badly wounded. And the author that wrote of this account – which is a true account – was a surgeon, a doctor, a surgeon in that same battle. And he was a Jew.

So they brought this young man in and the doctor said, "We're going to have to amputate one of your arms and one of your legs. So, we're going to give you chloroform and the main surgeon will be in in just a little while and he'll start the operation."

He said, "I won't take the chloroform. I refuse it."

He said, "It's doctor's orders."

He said, "Bring the doctor to me."

The doctor came in – this Jewish doctor. He said, "What's this I hear, son, you're not going to take chloroform? You're lucky to be alive. I thought about leaving you out there on the battle field. But somehow I had compassion on you and brought you here. Now you tell me that you won't even take chloroform to let us even try to save your life?"

He was adamant in his stand.

He said, "Well, you see, doctor. I'm a Christian. And God's brought me through a lot of things. I'm only seventeen, but I've been through a lot. And God has never failed me. And somehow God is telling me it's right for me not to take the chloroform."

He said, "Well, at least let me give you a couple of swigs of brandy."

He said, "Doctor, my daddy died a drunkard. And I vowed with my momma by my side and promised her and promised and God that I would never take the first drink."

You'll never become an alcoholic if you never take the first drink.

And he wouldn't take the brandy.

He said, “How would I feel if I had to die and have to meet God with alcohol on my breath?”

“Well,” the doctor said, “about that time I slipped in a little room and I took me a snort or two so I’d be able to get through with this thing.” But he said, “I did something I had never done before. I asked him if he’d like to see the chaplain.” He said, “I’ve never done that before – anybody.”

The chaplain came in and talked to him.

He said, “Well, doctor, he’s just not going to take that and he promised.”

He said, “Is there anything I can do for you? You might die? Is there anything I can do for you?”

He said, “Yes. I’d like you to take this Bible. And if I don’t make it – and her address is inside the front cover – send it, mail it to my mom and tell her there wasn’t a day that I didn’t read that book. And there hasn’t been a day that I haven’t prayed for her.”

He said he’d do it.

“And also I’d like you to write my Sunday School teacher in Sand Street Church in Brooklyn. And thank him for all the good advice he gave me.”

Teachers you don’t know who you may be teaching.

“He never steered me wrong. And tell him he’s been my inspiration in these cold battlefields.”

He said, “I’ll do it.”

He looked at the doctor and said, “Doctor, I’m ready. I won’t let out. I won’t even whimper.”

The doctor started cutting the flesh and he didn’t even move. Then when he took the saw out and started sawing the bones in two he heard Charlie whisper, “Oh, Jesus, sweet Jesus, help me now.”

He never lost consciousness. He never whimpered. He never moaned. And they performed that operation. This is a true account, folks. The surgeon was the one who wrote it. And it’s been in print for a hundred years or so. But when the day was over the doctor went to bed. He couldn’t sleep. And he got up a little after midnight and went over to check on the patients. And he talked to the doctor in charge.

And he said, “How are we doing tonight?”

And he said, “Well, there’ve been sixteen died tonight.”

He said, “What about Charlie?”

“Charlie’s still doing fine.”

He said, “You won’t believe what happened.” He said, “A little while after you left the chaplain came back with some Christian workers. And they had prayer and had a little service.” And he said, “Charlie sung as loud as the others. When they sang *Jesus, Lover of my Soul* he sang right in. You didn’t know he had a pain in the world.”

And the doctor said, “The more I heard about Jesus and the more people told me about what Jesus had done. Even though I admired this young man’s faith I hated Jesus even more than I did before. I hated him.”

Five days later they called the surgeon to come to Charlie’s bed.

Charlie said, “I’m going to leave you. I won’t be here come sunrise.” He said, “Doctor, I know you’re Jewish. And I know you don’t believe in my Jesus. You told me that. But,” he said, “I have a request to make of you. Will you stay with me? I want you to see how somebody dies trusting in Jesus.”

Charlie said, “I couldn’t stay there. I ran.”

Finally when the workers came back said, “He’s calling for you. It’s only going to be minutes.”

He went back in.

Charlie said, “Will you promise me one thing? I know you’re a Jew. And I know you believe differently than I do. But I’m going to tell you something. I love you more than any person I know except my momma.” He said, “The reason I love you is because you’re you.” He said, “The greatest friend I’ve ever had in this world was a Jew.”

“What was his name, son?”

“Jesus.”

It’s not the end of it – if I can get there.

He said, “I shook off what I know now was conviction.” But he said, “I never could get that boy out of my mind. Those big soft blue eyes could just look right through you. He was so sincere. If I’ve ever seen real religion – that boy had it.”

Ten years passed. He fought against Jesus every time. He fought against anything that looked like Christianity until finally he could go no more and he finally gave his life to Christ - the surgeon. A year and a half later he was in Brooklyn, New York. Just by accident he went into this Church on prayer meeting and he talked about he had never seen that before what we call a prayer meeting – a testimony meeting – everyone get up and tell what the Lord had done for him.

He said, “About mid way through the service this dear old lady stood and said, ‘I want you to pray for me. I’ve been to the doctor. He told me one lung is already gone. The other one is almost there. And I only have hours – at the most a few days – to live. It will probably be the last time I’ll be here at the

Church. But I just want to tell you how good God's been to me.' She said, 'I lost my husband he was a drunkard. But God had given us a beautiful son. He gave his life to Christ when he was a young man.' She said, 'He was in the Battle of Gettysburg and got his arm and his leg shot off. And the chaplain wrote us and told us all about it how that a Jewish surgeon was the one who amputated his limbs and said he talked that surgeon into staying with him while he crossed the river. And he promised that surgeon to never forget him. And he told the surgeon he prayed for him while he was cutting off his arm and his leg.'"

That doctor said, "I could sit no longer. I jumped up and ran across that Church and grabbed that little lady around." He said, "I want you to know that I'm that doctor. I'm the one he prayed for."

Oh, may God help us. God may give us dying grace when it comes our turn.

"How do you know, preacher?"

I've seen it time and time again.