

**John 5.1-9a**

Lord, Command What You Will  
And Give What You Command

**Aim:** to see in this sign from Jesus our total inability to heal ourselves and our total need for His sovereign grace to heal and to save us.

**Scripture Reading:** 2 Peter 1.1-12

**INTRODUCTION:**

Most of you are at least somewhat familiar with St. Augustine. Augustine was a theologian/philosopher and has attributed much to both Protestant and Catholic beliefs. Augustine lived a very aggressive hedonistic life. He was in bondage to the lust of his flesh in regards to sexual immorality. His mother was a strong Christian influence in his life, but it wasn't until he was a little over 30 when he was set free from the slavery of sexually immorality and converted to Christianity. He is considered one of the greatest theologians and thinkers that the church has ever produced.

Of his many writings and many quotes I want to give you a quote from Augustine this morning. *"O Lord, command what you will and give what you command."* This prayer; this sentence was at the heart of Augustine's battle of the will with Pelagius. "Pelagius was a British monk who lived in Rome. He taught that "though grace may facilitate the achieving of righteousness, grace is not necessary to that end." Pelagius denied the doctrine of original sin, and asserted that human nature at its core is good and able to do all it is commanded to do. Therefore Pelagius was shocked when he read in Augustine's Confessions" this prayer/this sentence. (Piper, Sermon: The Swan is not Silent)

*"Command what you will and give what you command"* is a desperate plea to God that not only recognizes God's absolute sovereignty to command whatever He wills to command, but also recognizes Augustine's inability to obey that command unless God gives the ability to obey. To say it slightly different... God, command what you will, but please give me the ability to obey what you command. In this prayer is a pure testimony to the Sovereignty of God and the inability of man apart from God's benevolence.

God must give to every man the ability to obey what God has commanded. Man is absolutely unable to obey even the easiest of commands from God. His soul is dead. His flesh is alive and his flesh longs to keep his soul dead. Augustine would later say, against Pelagius' belief of the freedom of the will, Augustine said, "During all those years [of rebellion], where was my free will? What was the hidden, in that secret place from which it was summoned in a moment, so that I might bend my neck to your easy yoke?" (Piper, Sermon: The Swan is not Silent)

There is absolute inability in man's captive will to even obey one word of God's commands, much less any and all of God's commands. "*Oh Lord, command what you will and give what you command*" should be every person's prayer to God every day for that sustaining grace to overcome temptation and sin and to obey the non-burdensome commands of God for the believer.

Our total inability should equal our total dependence and need from God to supply the very ability to obey what He commands.

Today, God, Jesus, the Word made flesh is going to command a sick and lame man to **get up and walk**. He's been sick and lame and most likely paralyzed for 38 years. So where does this man get the ability to obey Jesus' command to **get up and walk**? Jesus must give him something in order for him to obey. What does Jesus give him?

### **Let's read it together...John 5.1-9a**

**Title:** Lord, Command What You Will And Give What You Command

**Aim:** to see in this sign from Jesus our total inability to heal ourselves and our total need for His sovereign grace to heal and to save us.

### **Jesus Is Journeying Again** (v.1)

**"After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem."**

I've said this already and I'll say it again...In the gospel of John Jesus is on the move. He is journeying from town to town, city to city, and region to region. He is sojourning with his disciples and demonstrating to them their great calling that is going to come to them very soon. Jesus had no place to lay his head and day after day His disciples are learning Jesus' complete dependence upon the Father.

How many of you know that every disciple of Christ not only needs to learn truth that is poured into them, but disciples need to see truth that is lived before them. Jesus exposes His disciples to this great truth that this is not our world and we have all been placed here at a particular time for a particular people, so that the Father might add more worshipers of the nations for Himself.

So after all the things we read in **John 4** in Cana of Galilee...Jesus leaves Cana; He leaves Galilee and He now goes to **Jerusalem for the feast of the Jews** and to engage **a sick man**.

Everything Jesus did was so purposeful and meaningful. Nothing was ever done haphazardly. Everything is calculated and precise and exact. It almost seems as if Jesus is the Son of God, doesn't it?

So Jesus heads back to **Jerusalem for the feast of the Jews**. We are not told which **feast** it was, but we are told it was **the feast of the Jews** which does tell us that Jesus is simply following and obeying the teaching of **Deuteronomy 16.16**.

**Deuteronomy 16.16. "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, at the Feast of Unleavened Bread and at the Feast of Weeks and at the Feast of Booths, and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed."**

So Jesus is now in **Jerusalem at the feast of the Jews** and the Apostle John quickly moves along in the narrative in **verse 2**.

### **The Sheep Gate** (v.2a)

**"Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered."**

I read an article many years ago on **the Sheep Gate** and this is what it says. "**The Sheep Gate** also known today as Stephen's Gate (because it was by this gate that Stephen was martyred) is located on the east wall, north of the Temple Mount. When Nehemiah was sent back to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem **the Sheep Gate** was the first to be restored, and was built by the High Priest and his fellow priests.

It was called **the Sheep Gate** because it led out to the sheep markets, where lambs were sold for sacrifice in the Temple and it led into **the Sheep pool** where sheep were washed for sacrificing (later this became the Pool of Bethesda). **The Sheep Gate** also led to Golgotha, the path Jesus took to the crucifixion.

It has been noted that when Jesus entered into the city it was always through **the Sheep Gate**. The only time this was different was when Jesus entered into the city from the Mount of Olives at His triumphal entry. If Jesus came into the city through **the Sheep Gate** it was significant.” It would have been a real life illustration of Him saying with His very life, **“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”**. **“The Sheep Gate** led into the Temple compound and the brazen alter.”

Jesus says in **John 10** in the parable of the Good Shepherd in **verse 9**...

**“I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.”**

**“The Sheep Gate** represents the experience of salvation made available through the cross—that is, a realization that Jesus was indeed **“the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world”**. **The Sheep Gate** then speaks to us of the cross and the sacrifice that was made for our sins” through the Person of Jesus Christ. (Gates of Jerusalem article from [gatesofjerusalem.org](http://gatesofjerusalem.org))

Can you imagine what Jesus would think every time He walked through **the Sheep Gate** into the city in the direction of the Temple? Can you then imagine what Jesus would think every time He would walk through **the Sheep Gate** out of the city in the direction of Golgotha? He was the Lamb that was to be slain as propitiation, as an offering of appeasement, to God the Father for the sins of many. What an absolutely beautiful picture that we are given as we are able to look back at the significance of this gate... **the Sheep Gate**.

## **The House Of Mercy** (v.2b-3a)

**“by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered.”**

But the Apostle John says that there was also **a pool at the Sheep Gate which is called in Hebrew Bethesda** and it has **five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered.**

The term **Bethesda** means “house of mercy”. This **pool of Bethesda**, this **pool** or house of mercy was located **by the Sheep Gate**. One commentator says “it seems that there were two adjacent pools and the area that enclosed them was marked by four covered colonnades, with another one centered between the two pools. These formed cloisters, or covered alcoves, around the pool”, so **the pool of Bethesda** had **five porticoes** which are basically porches or porch covers that lead from one place to the other.

The Apostle John says that in these **porticoes** **“lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered.”** There was a **multitude**, which means that there were a great number of **those who were sick**. This **pool** and all the **porticoes** were packed with **sick** people. And every time Jesus would walk through **the Sheep Gate** into the city He would see this **multitude** of **sick** people.

## **The Moving Of The Water** (v.3b-4)

**“[waiting for the moving of the waters; for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.]”**

If you notice in your bible there is a bracket in **verse 3** and at the end of **verse 4**. These brackets indicate to us that this part of Scripture was not in the original gospel account, but was added not by the translators of your bible to help it read smoothly, like the italic words, but added possibly by scribes in order to further explain why the **multitude** of **sick** people gathered in the **porticoes**.

What is difficult for me to discern at this time is if this addition by the scribes was added because they were helping to explain the belief of the **sick** people or if they added it to help explain what actually happened to the **sick** people. What I mean is I'm not sure enough if the healing that was said to take place was an actual healing by God or if it was just a superstitious belief of the people. So the scribes added this in the gospel account to explain why the **multitude** of **sick** people gathered. Some bibles rightfully omit the words in the brackets.

But what we do know is that “some who have visited the area have described the waters as having a reddish color, probably from deposits of iron or other chemicals and minerals. The **pool** had the kind of reputation associated nowadays with a healing spa.” (John Phillips, p. 99)

D.A. Carson describes the **pool** as Chalybeate. So I jumped online to learn more about this. Chalybeate are springs impregnated with salts of iron and minerals. So possibly what was happening was that the minerals in the water, when the water was **stirred up** by the springs that fed into the **pool** could have relieved the people of some of their sicknesses. But honestly, I don't know.

But what is more important is there was **a man** who was **lying there** by the **pool**.

### **The Sick Man** (v.5)

**“A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.”**

The Apostle John doesn't say back in **verse 3** that there were *some* people there at the **pool**. He doesn't even say that there were *many* people there at the **pool**. John says there was a **multitude** of **sick** people at the **pool**; a great number. And now John writes about **“a man”** out of or distinguished from the **multitude**.

John Phillips says, “That multitude represented humankind. There the sufferers lay, waiting, believing, and despairing. There they were brought, there they were left—lying at the gates of a dead religion, so to speak—hoping against hope, bolstering flagging beliefs, passed by priests and people alike, longing for some kind of a miracle, perhaps fearful lest their religion prove powerless to meet their greatest need.”

Then there is this **man**. This one **man**. “He had been there a very long time. John says it was **thirty-eight years**, half a lifetime. It may be that he had been brought there in his teens and left there to make the best of things. We can imagine how hope deferred had made his heart sick, and how his expectations during his first months at the pool had given way to despair and then to dull acceptance of his fate. One by one, with the passing of years, his friends had left him. Now he was abandoned, evidently paralyzed. Unable to move, he had become a fixture. Days came and went; days became months; months became years. Others stronger and more agile than he, were always ahead of him when the waters were “troubled.” Yet he clung to his pathetic belief in the miraculous healing power of the pool.

But it was not for him. As for the thought that some priest or prophet would offer to help him into the **pool**—well, he knew enough about organized religion by now to know that it had its forms and rituals, its attendants, ministers, and devotees. But much good that was ever likely to do him.

How can we measure the misery of this man? He had no friends, no family. His companions were life’s victims: **blind** people; **lame** people; people **withered** up inside and out. All their hopes had shrunk to the chance they had of outsmarting the others and being first in the **pool**. Here was institutionalized misery; unending poverty.

Then one day **Jesus** came. Our attention is directed to the Master.”

### **Sovereign Initiative** (v.6)

**“When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, ‘Do you wish to get well?’”**

Out of the **multitude that lay there sick, blind, lame, and withered** Jesus goes to this one **man**. Jesus again takes the sovereign initiative to choose from the **multitude**; one **man**. But don’t you know Jesus already **knew** him?

John says, “**Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition.**”

How did the great Healer know him? How did the great Healer know how **long he had been in that condition**? Was it just good insight? Could He tell by how old and worn out his clothes were? Or was there something greater about Jesus?

There’s actually more to this story about this **man** and Jesus choosing this man later in **John 5** that we will get to next time, but here in **verse 5** we are told that Jesus **knew** this man. And the kind of **knowledge** that Jesus has of him is supernatural **knowledge**. It is divine **knowledge**. It is heavenly **knowledge**. It is godly **knowledge**. There is something amazing and other-worldly about this man called **Jesus!**

**Jesus** did not become aware of him and his **thirty-eight year** condition, but He divinely **knew** this **man** and that **he had been a long time in that condition.**

So out of the **multitude** of the **sick, the blind, the lame, and the withered** Jesus sovereignly picks this one **man** that Jesus **knew** about intimately and then John writes further in **verses 6-7,**

### **The Man’s Ignorance** (v.6-7)

**“Jesus said to him, ‘Do you wish to get well?’ The sick man answered Him, ‘Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me.’”**

This **man** was ignorant to who Jesus was. He had no idea Who was asking him the question and to Whom he was answering. Jesus asked this **man** the question that plagued his life for **thirty-eight years. Do you wish to get well?**

But what we are told by John is that because this **man** had no idea who Jesus was he didn’t even answer Him in the affirmative like, “Yes, I wish to get well.” Rather this **man’s** mind was fixed on the absence of any other man helping him get to the **pool** and also his own inability to get himself there.



Do you remember how Jesus answered the Samaritan woman?

**John 4.10 “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.”**

If this **man** knew who it is who asks him, **Do you wish to get well?** He would have asked Him or implored Him, “Lord, please make me well.” But his default answer is to speak further about his miserable circumstances. He confesses his inability and on some level blames others for not helping him into the pool.

### **Jesus’ Compassion And Power (v.8)**

**“Jesus said to him, ‘Get up, pick up your pallet and walk.’”**

What we see in **verse 8** is not a healing of a **man** because of his faith. There’s nothing here that indicates this man had biblical belief and faith. Jesus simply heals this **man** out of sheer compassion for his misery. Jesus displays his compassion and power upon a **man** who was **sick, lame** and possibly paralyzed for **thirty-eight years**.

In Jesus’ command here for a **lame** man to **get up and walk** is another sign that points us to Jesus. In this one moment of compassion and power in the **man’s** body we are shown the glory of the Christ and WE are shown this so that WE will believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you might have life in His name.

Do you see His compassion and power to heal this **man**? Do you believe in His compassion and power in healing this **man**? Do you savor His compassion and power in healing this **man**?

Jesus commanded the **sick, lame man** to **get up and pick up your pallet and walk** and don’t you know that Jesus also gave the **sick, lame man** the ability to do what Jesus’ commanded.

Do you remember back to Augustine? “Oh Lord, command what you will and give what you command.”

Jesus commanded a **sick, lame** and paralyzed **man to get up and to pick his pallet up and walk**. John writes in **verse 9**,

### **Jesus Gives Him Ability** (v.9a)

**“Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk.”**

How does this **sick, lame** and paralyzed **man** obey what Jesus commanded? Because Jesus gave Him what He commanded him to do. Jesus through His word and healing power empowered this **sick, lame** and paralyzed **man** to obey by **getting up, picking up his pallet and walking**.

John Piper says, “When Jesus speaks, diseased muscles and bones obey. And they obey “at once.” This is the Apostle John exulting again in the sovereign power of Jesus the same way he did in **John 4:52–53** where the official’s son was healed at exactly the seventh hour 15 miles away when Jesus said the words.”

The word **walk** actually means to walk about. Jesus commanded this **man** to **get up, pick up his pallet, and to walk**, to walk about. This would show everyone that this **man** was indeed healed immediately. He wasn’t stammering or stumbling in his steps. He **walked** about so that all would see and he even was given the amazing ability to **pick up his pallet and walk** about with his **pallet**. He picked up his bed folks! He picked up his pallet and walked about.

What an amazing sign before us! What an amazing God before us! We see Jesus’ compassion on this **man** and for all indication he isn’t even a believer, but Jesus heals him physically anyway and demonstrates His divine and awesome power in his **lame**, dead muscles and body.

What we see in this account of the healing of the paralyzed **man** is actually our spiritual self. We are totally incapable of healing ourselves spiritually. We are **sick, lame**, and paralyzed spiritually. The efforts of others can’t and will not heal us. We are left only to the compassion and power of Jesus Christ working in the power of the Spirit and by the will of the Father to heal our spiritual sickness and paralyzation.

Therefore, the most compassionate thing I can tell you this morning is that you cannot **get up** in your own power and follow Jesus. You are totally incapable of following Jesus in your own strength and power. You are at best **sick, lame** and paralyzed spiritually.

But because of the Father's good will and by Jesus' authority the Holy Spirit comes to those who are spiritually **sick, lame**, and paralyzed and then and only then can they **walk about** as followers of Christ, because they were given by God what God commanded.

If you are here this morning and you remain **sick, lame** and paralyzed spiritually...please cry out to God and pray to God that God would command what He wills but that He would give what He commands. You right now can be at the mercy of God to heal and to save you.

Please be reconciled to God. Pray that God will heal you and save you spiritually. Are you not tired and wore out from a sin-filled **sick** and **lame** life? Are you not tired and wore out from being powerless over sin? Jesus died so that you might be healed. Jesus died for your sin-filled **sick** and **lame** life, so that you would be set free to **get up** and follow after Him.

For the ones who have been commanded and given the ability to follow Christ. Do you see the compassion of Jesus? Do you see His power to heal this man? Do you believe even more this morning because of this sign in John? Will you savor, delight and enjoy Jesus more because of what you see and believe?

Please do not let this miracle, this sign fall on a casual heart or a heart that is familiar with this good story. Pray that God will take His word and magnify Himself in you and through you. You were made new to praise the Lord. You were made new to worship the Lord. You were made new to enjoy His presence and power in your life. **Get up** and **walk** about and worship Him!

Let this sign from Jesus lead you to further and deeper belief in Jesus. Let it lead you to greater love and worship of Jesus. He is worthy! He is worthy!