

July 27, 2014  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: John  
Community Baptist Church  
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Greer, SC 29650  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study John 5:1-16.

1. Why does John connect much of Jesus' teaching and ministry with feasts in Jerusalem?
2. Why did Jesus go to the Pool of Bethesda?
3. Contrast the attitude and response of the healed lame man in this story and the healed blind man in John 9.
4. Why did Jesus heal this man?

### **DO YOU WANT TO BE HEALED?**

#### **John 5:1-16**

Nearly all the information about Jesus' ministry that John placed in chapters five through eleven took place in connection with some kind of festival in Jerusalem. It is a good reminder to us that John did not arrange his account of Jesus' ministry in strict chronological order. While the record is generally chronological, John left out many of the events the other Gospel writers included. At the same time, John included events that the others left out. He did these things to accomplish the task God sent him to do: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

That was the purpose of this miracle of healing at the Pool of Bethesda. As we shall see from the story, Jesus did not heal this man so that the guy would feel good about Jesus or even to be grateful. That didn't happen. Jesus didn't heal the man so that the religious leaders would jump on His bandwagon. That didn't happen either. Nor did Jesus heal the man so that the crowd would surge around Him and accept Him as Messiah. In this story, it almost appears as though the crowd was completely unaware that a lame man got up and walked around.

Jesus did a stupendous miracle for a needy man so that sinners would have reason to believe that this man was God in the flesh. Therefore, God died for my sins. How could I not believe and receive eternal life? So the question Jesus asked the lame man is much like the question He poses to sinners. "Do you want to be saved?" What is your answer to that question? Can you prove it?

#### **The Third Miracle (vv.1-9a).**

Jesus found needy people in Jerusalem (vv.1-3[4]). According to the first verse in our text, He was in Jerusalem for a feast. *After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem (v.1).* This trip took place some time after Jesus healed the official's son. Probably it had been a matter of months since Jesus and the disciples had gone to Galilee. As this Gospel proves, John regularly described Jesus' ministry in connection with various feasts. For example, John wrote about Jesus' teaching and works in connection with Passover (2:13), Passover (6:4), Tabernacles (7:2), Dedication (10:22), Passover (11:55). He did not describe the particular feast here, though some think it was the Feast of Tabernacles.

The feasts were always important times for the Jews. God commanded His people to observe seven of them each year. Three of these annual feasts required all adult males who lived within a reasonable distance to attend (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles). The feasts were a very significant part of Israel's spiritual character because all of them pictured God's provision for and beneficial work in behalf of His people. In particular, all of the feasts portrayed some about God's most important provision of all, Jesus Christ the Messiah and Savior. Something about His work and character is revealed in

each feast. Therefore, it is fitting that He revealed Himself as such at the various feasts.

While in Jerusalem at this feast, Jesus specifically went to the pool of Bethesda (vv.2-3a [4]). It was a well known place. *Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed (vv.2-3a).* The Greek text, more than the English translation, implies that everyone knew about this particular pool. It was well known in comparison to the fact that there were several pools and cisterns in Jerusalem. This particular pool was the one located by the sheep place. The Greek word (*probatikos*) simply means “pertaining to sheep.” The people in Jerusalem named the pool *Bethesda*, which means “House of outpouring.” The discoveries of modern archaeological digs indicate that it was a significant pool. This dig reveals the accuracy of John in describing the pool as the one with *five roofed colonnades*.

It appears that every day a multitude of handicapped people gathered at this pool. Why that pool or that place? This pool was notoriously a somewhat magical place. The Greek text which is called the “Received Text” (which is based primarily on Greek manuscript evidence that were copied from about 1000 to 1250) includes the following description. The invalids were *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 first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted (vv.3b-4).*

That description sounds a bit farfetched and magical to the modern thinker. It sounds odd especially in light of the fact that there are no other accounts in the Bible of an angel doing miracles of healing. Probably this is a gloss, a situation in which a scribe who copied the scriptures on parchment believed this legend and wrote it in the margin. Then maybe fifty or hundred years later, another scribe was copying the parchment the first scribe had copied and wondered if the statement about the angel wasn’t really supposed to be in the text. This scribe also believed the legend of the angel and, not surprisingly, the marginal note was inserted into the text and became “Scripture.” It seems clear that this was the case since the older

copies of Greek texts that we have available for study do not include this fanciful explanation for the “miracle.”

So what was really happening here? We know that the pool was fed from two larger pools called Solomon’s pools and also from some springs. It seems logical that at various times a rush of water would enter the pools from the springs which would stir the waters. It is also known that the springs and pool were rich in mineral content which might even cause the bubbling pool to darken in color. Legend held that the first sick person to get into the water when the unseen “angel” stirred it up would be healed. This was a well known legend though there is no record of anyone actually being healed in this way. However, at the same time, because of the mineral content in the water, it would be assumed to have a healing characteristic. Even in our day, some people still contend for the usefulness of mineral rich waters.

This was obviously a well known legend. We know that the early church father Tertullian, who wrote around the year 200, makes reference to this legend with an asterisk. That is the setting to which Jesus went. A setting in which, if he touched one of the sick who were lying beside the pool, He would be ceremonially impure according to the religious leaders’ rules.

Jesus went to the pool that day to help one particular person (vv.5-9). The man was needy but not searching. Apparently the guy firmly believed the “angel” story. John wrote, *One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years (v.5).* That is not to say that someone had brought him to this pool every day for thirty-eight years. Rather, it seems that for most of the man’s life he had been invalid, not at all what God intended His created beings to be like.

The man’s condition is a perfect picture of our natural sinful condition— far from the standard of “good” that God created. And he waited beside the water that was actually powerless to change him, hoping beyond hope. He was like the people at the wedding who witnessed Jesus turning water, that was used to symbolically make spiritually impure hands pure, into wine that represented the New Covenant in His blood—the only way to be purified from sin’s dark blot. He was like the woman at the well who was never satisfied with literal water, but who learned about the living water that cleanses from sin and satisfies for eternity. This man whose hope was placed

in magical waters was about to have his ailment washed away by the living Water Jesus Christ.

His handicap was going to disappear because Jesus had compassion. *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?” (v.6).* Jesus knew the man’s condition better than the man himself knew it. Jesus perceived that the man was a sinner who needed cleansing from sin. He also knew that the man’s physical handicap was the result of sin’s curse. Therefore, Jesus asked the man if he wanted to be healed. That seems like an odd question to ask an invalid who had been lying beside the “healing pool” many times, for a long time. Common sense knows that the answer to this question is, “Yes, of course I want to be healed.”

Jesus’ question probably sounded a bit foolish to the man or to anyone else who heard it. When I was a boy, one summer day I was under the big maple tree in the front yard trying to start my go-cart, and it was not cooperating. Along came a boy named Ray who lived up the road. He parked his bicycle and then sat on it for several minutes watching me pull the rope on the engine to no avail. Finally Ray spoke up. “What’s the matter? Won’t it start?” he asked. In my typical sarcastic way I replied, “Oh sure it will start. I’m just pulling this rope for my exercise!” That is probably how the crippled man felt about Jesus’ question.

And yet the Gospel record reveals many times when Jesus presents the question of satisfying need when the answer seems obvious. Such was the case with the woman at the well. When the woman seemed confused about Jesus’ request for water, *Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water” (John 4:10).* We will discover His offer of enduring satisfaction in Jesus’ discourse on the Bread of life. *Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:32-33).* Do you want eternally satisfying bread?

That is the same kind of question all sinners must grapple with.

Do we understand our need? Do we desire to be unchained from sin’s power and penalty? It is astonishing how often the answer to Jesus’ question is “No,” or at least “Not yet.”

Jesus, moved by His heart of compassion, asked the lame man if he wanted to be healed. In response, it appears that this guy was somewhat of a grouch. *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” (v.7).* The guy is a study in contrasts with the blind man of chapter nine. That man was very thankful for Jesus’ healing and firmly defended him. But this fellow seems agitated that Jesus asked, never learned the name of His healer, blamed Jesus for him breaking the law, and when he did learn who healed him, he turned Jesus into the authorities. Oh, but did he not show respect when He called Jesus, “Sir”? The term “*Sir*” is nothing more than a social courtesy. His answer proves that the man firmly believed the angel stirring the water legend. Because of his physical handicap, the man was in a dilemma and made sure that Jesus understood it—in no uncertain terms!

Jesus didn’t walk away from the grouch. We would have. But Jesus healed the man for His own glory. The healing was immediate upon Jesus’ command. *Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk” (v.8).* Observe that there was no audience participation. There was no user interaction. In fact, the guy never really answered Jesus’ question in the affirmative. Jesus healed the man because He chose to heal the man. It surely wasn’t because of anything the man did or said.

This is such a great picture of our salvation. We are all like crotchety, old sinners. We are deaf, blind, and dead to truth and righteousness. Given the choice to receive eternal life, we would naturally be obtuse. But God graciously draws us to the Savior who offers to heal our eternally terminal disease called sin, and we embrace the offer with the faith He gives us. Christ saves us for His own glory!

When Jesus spoke the command, there was an immediate result. *And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked (v.9).* The miracle was instantaneous and enduring. Notice that the healed man did not even stop to thank his Benefactor. He didn’t even bother to learn His name. He just walked away as if he somehow

deserved to be healed. That is not a picture of a born-again person. Jesus did this miracle to illustrate His power and divinity. It is like the miracle of turning water into wine at which the people were thankful, but no one seemed to converted to faith. Or it is like the woman at the well, if she was not born again, but only impressed by Jesus' knowledge about her. Nevertheless, this miracle was not wasted. Jesus did these things so that we might believe that He is the Christ, God in the flesh. I believe! He is my Savior from sin! And I feel sorry for the old coot if he never made the connection.

### **Jesus' Work Exposed Unbelieving Hearts (vv.9b-16).**

The healed man had to be impressed that Jesus had done a wonderful thing. Surely we are so impressed. But not everyone was delighted about the miracle. The religious rulers wondered what kind of man would heal on the Sabbath (vv.9b-13). These people were the authorities who insisted that people keep their law. John pointed out specifically that Jesus healed on the Sabbath. *Now that day was the Sabbath (v.9b)*. Jesus' authority over the Sabbath is a key controversy in John's account of His ministry. Jesus proved that He had authority over sickness by healing people. He proved authority over nature by calming the sea. He proved authority over demons by casting them out. He proved authority over death by raising the dead. He proved authority over sin by forgiving and dismissing it. And since He was truly God, Jesus had authority over the Sabbath which He Himself established.

Jesus the Creator established the Sabbath and then along came the Jews who turned it into a burden by attaching multiple rules to it. They were quite sure that Jesus had sinned by breaking a Sabbath law, and the healed man compounded the "sin" by carrying his bed. The law did not permit people to carry their beds on 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" (v.10)*.

Those authorities had all kinds of laws that prohibited any number of activities on the Sabbath. For example, they said that on the Sabbath a man may not put vinegar on his teeth to alleviate toothache. But he may take vinegar with his food in the ordinary course of affairs, and the Rabbis philosophically concluded, "If he is

healed, he is healed" (*Shab. 14:4*). Their Mishna says: "He that reapeth corn on the Sabbath to the quantity of a fig is guilty; and plucking corn is reaping." To them rubbing the grain out was threshing. Even to walk on the grass on the Sabbath was forbidden because it was a species of threshing.

Who were these strict people? The term *Jews* refers to the religious leaders who were primarily the Pharisees which often included scribes and elders. This story begins the ongoing, open conflict the leaders had with Jesus until they killed Him. His breaking of their laws was always the crux of the matter. In this case, Jesus broke the law by healing on the Sabbath and then encouraged the man to break the law by carrying his bed. But when he was confronted about the matter, the man claimed innocence. *But he answered them, "The man who healed me, that man said to me, 'Take up your bed, and walk'" (v.11)*. When the authorities confronted the healed man, he blamed Jesus. Again, he is contrasted to the healed blind man who defended Jesus.

Who would willfully break the "acceptable" law? The authorities wanted to know who gave the man such a command. *They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" (v.12)*. Obviously someone was intentionally encouraging others to break the scribes' law! Who would dare do that? That a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years was walking around carrying his mat didn't seem to register. This is so much like the leaders of Islam. Here is a man who steals, lies, cheats, and beats his wife. Christ hunts him down and saves him from sin. Instantaneously and eternally the man's life is changed. Now he is kind, honest, and loving. He will make a wonderful citizen for the community. But the Imams and the leaders don't care about that. That this man broke their laws is all that matters, and he should be punished!

The religious authorities demanded that the healed man identify the "perpetrator." The healed man really didn't know who it was. *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 (v.13)*. Wouldn't we expect the man to be so grateful for healing that he would have at least asked Jesus' name? Why didn't he desire to cling to Jesus like others who were healed? It wasn't like Jesus evaporated into thin air.

He just stepped into the crowd and was gone. And the healed man didn't care.

The rest of the text points out the important principle that sin carries serious consequences (vv.14-16). To the healed man, Jesus issued a stern warning. *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" (v.14).* After the authorities had confronted the healed man, Jesus found him in the temple precincts. This is not necessarily an indication that he was offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving. It was a feast, and almost everyone hung out at the temple precincts.

When He found the man, Jesus offered a serious warning about the connection between sin and sickness. This is interesting because in the case of the blind man, Jesus will tell the disciples that his condition was not due to a specific sin. That is not always the case. Sometimes sickness is due specifically to sinfulness. David admitted this when he wrote, *For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer (Psalm 32:3-4).* Moses warned God's people, *If you are not careful to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, the LORD your God, then the LORD will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions, afflictions severe and lasting, and sicknesses grievous and lasting (Deuteronomy 28:58-59).* In New Testament times, Ananias and Sapphira got really sick because of their sin (Acts 5:1-11). That is why Paul warned, *That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died (1 Corinthians 11:30).* And in a similar way John warned, *If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that (1 John 5:16).* There are definitely times when sickness or death is the consequence of particular sins or a pattern of sinning.

Jesus' warning implied that this man's malady was the result of specific sin, not just the general principle of sin. He warned the man to stop his lifestyle of sinning or he would face worse consequences. The worse consequences would be eternal punishment. In other

words, Jesus warned this man to whom He graciously gave physical wholeness that he needed to be born again!

Sin's consequences were also obvious in the sinful weakness that resisted Jesus. Here was a recipient of Christ's blessing who shifted the blame for his "sin." *The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him (v.15).* The recipient of blessing showed his gratitude by turning Jesus into the authorities. This was tacit rejection of Jesus who blessed him. He was so like Americans who enjoy unparalleled material blessings from God's hand and yet reject Him as Master and Savior.

At the same time, the self-appointed authorities also sinned. John tells us that *this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath (v.16).* That the religious leaders were persecuting Jesus is obvious. That is what Jesus meant when He told the disciples that these people hated Him because of the works He showed them (John 15:24).

Jesus of Nazareth astonished people with His displays of might and power. He did it so that people would believe Him. In spite of His mercy, kindness, and compassion accompanied by power and majesty, even the recipients of His blessings rejected Him out of hand. Nevertheless, in grace He continued to draw people to salvation and He gathered His people around Himself. How grateful we should be if Jesus sought us out and healed us of our sinful condition, giving us eternal life.