

## Jesus Heals the Disabled Man at the Pool of Bethesda

John 5:1-18

*Jesus Came That Day To Meet A Man In His Place Of Need* – cf. John 5:1-9 10-13

- John sets the context as “After these things,” referring to the “things” surrounding the healing of the nobleman’s son, the king’s official, with which he closed his account of Jesus’ visit to Galilee. He sets the events to follow in Jerusalem in the area of the Temple – initially near the sheep gate at the pool named Bethesda. The occasion was an unspecified “feast of the Jews.”

John tells us of a pool – Bethesda – surrounded by five colonnades, which legend has it has healing powers. It is believed that from time to time an angel stirs the water and the first person to enter the waters after the angel’s visit would experience healing from their ailment/affliction.

- In setting the scene John says that it was customary for a “great number” of sick and disabled people to lie in these colonnades, taking shelter while waiting for the waters to stir. They waited with what would seem to be a desperate hope to find healing and relief.

**Note:** I might add that according to scholars – the people who were present in this place awaiting healing would have been considered “unclean” and likely would’ve have been prohibited from more sacred space. In addition the upper class and those wishing to remain ritually pure would’ve avoided this place.<sup>1</sup> *These were people marginalized, in so many ways, in a culture hardened to profound human suffering.*

- John identified a single man from the multitude – remember this is a retrospective recounting of what took place that day. He introduces to us a man who had been badly disabled for 38 years. Imagine the man’s desperation and sense of being alone after 38 years of disability. He sat there among many others who were sick and desperate for healing (cf. 5:5).

- Jesus “seeing” that man and He “knowing” that he had been there, in that condition for such a long time He asked the man if he wanted to be healed. Note that Jesus’ encounter with the invalid man was no less intentional and planned than the encounter He had with the Samaritan woman at the well near Sychar or the royal official (*Basilikos*) who came from Capernaum to Cana, frightened and desperate, to beg Jesus to come back with him because his son was dying and he wanted Jesus to heal him.

- The man’s answer to Jesus set in stark contrast the long wait of 38 years and the inability to help himself or to find any relief with Jesus’ miraculous healing. Jesus simply said “Rise up! Take up your mat and walk.” The man was immediately cured/made well (cf. 5:7-9)

**Note:** This healing was done on the Sabbath and became the occasion for the tension that existed between Jesus and the Jewish leadership to worsen. In addition it set up Jesus’ discourse in 5:16-

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Keener and Andreas Kostenberger respectively

47 in which Jesus clarified just exactly who He is. I want us to think about three things from the interaction to follow.

***The Heart/Compassion Of Jesus In Contrast To The Cold Religious Concern For Law Seen In The Jews*** – cf. 5:10-13

- The Jews were more concerned with Sabbath law than with human compassion. When they ask him the reason for violating the Sabbath he told him that the man who healed him told him to pick up his mat and walk. This is an astonishing response which persists throughout this narrative (cf. 5:10-12, 15-16). **1.** Either they recognized him and did not care that he was healed – Imagine that they knew who he was – 38 years an invalid and coming to this pool for miraculous healing for many of those years. They are only concerned about the technical violation of Sabbath law and not – “Joe! You’re walking! What happened?!!” **2. a.)** They did not recognize him – perhaps because he was out of context and all of these years he had only been a faceless cripple to them. After their initial statement and “Joe’s” response, wouldn’t it have been, “Joe! Is that you!? That’s so great! Who healed you?” **b.)** Perhaps much worse and more likely, they did not know him because for all of these years, despite his laying there desperate for healing – he was just another non-person who meant nothing to them tucked away with other “undesirables” in an “undesirable” place. Now as he identifies himself as one who had been healed they still could not be bothered with this miracle of compassion. ***They could not enter into his joy because they did not enter into his tragic suffering.***

- In glorious contrast Jesus – the One who sought the man out – who stood there in that “unclean” place among those “unclean” people - is God incarnate. He ***came*** for the purpose of solidarity and sympathy with suffering humanity. He entered into our weaknesses and suffering so that He can sympathize (cf. Hebrews 4:14-5:10). That is exactly what was taking place at the pool that day. Jesus ***came*** that day with the very same heart! Jesus, God incarnate, looked upon a single human being that Sabbath day – He was not faceless; He was not forgotten; Here was God Himself looking upon Him with care and compassion. ***More amazingly, in order to be there in that place, among those people, for the purpose of healing that man – Jesus had to “become” and “experience” his weakness and suffering*** – (cf. Hebrews 2:14-18). It was more than a simple yet powerful moment of healing!! Like before – it was a moment in anticipation of the cross – a “full gospel” moment!!

***Jesus Came To Call A Man To Holiness*** – (cf. 5:14; also 1 Peter 1:13-21; Hebrews 12:12-15, esp. v.14; 1 Timothy 3:1-5)

- Jesus found the man in the Temple and made clear to him what you and I have come to know. This was not about temporary healing or relief from suffering. It was about holiness AND deliverance ***from judgement*** and deliverance ***into eternal life***. Jesus ***came*** not simply to heal our physical ailments. There were likely dozens upon dozens of people lying around that pool waiting who were left in their sickness/incapacities. He came to make us holy – not to simply to

atone for sin but to transform us into those who pursue holiness out of love for Him – those who desire holiness!! ***That is the reason Jesus ties this event/interaction to the work of the cross in His discourse to follow.***

- Jesus introduce the following discourse on His relationship to the Father by this healing miracle – cf. 1:1-4, 14, 17-18; 5:17-18, 19-30. Jesus did not allow for the miracle of healing to be separated from the cross and the work of the Father in redeeming.

\*Jesus did not deny the Jews inference that He was making Himself equal with God – He doubled down (cf. read 5:19-30). The works Jesus did were the works of the Father. The words Jesus spoke were the words of the Father. In the most glorious way – the One who said “Rise up...,” the One present at that pool in that moment was seated in Heaven.

\*When Jesus said to that man – “See you are well. Stop sinning...” He was speaking the words of the Father - expressing the heart of God – who came to own our hearts and give Himself to us in love (this is eternal life).

- To isolate this as simply a miracle of compassion and healing is to fail to understand the truly fallen condition of humanity. The “worse” condition against which Jesus warns is eternal judgement. The death which Jesus came to conquer is the second death – condemnation – of which the first death is but a symptom. The life Jesus and healing which He came to accomplish and offer to us freely is the life that is life indeed. As He said “Rise” to that man on that day – as He called Lazarus out of the tomb – so too one day the dead will hear His voice call them to life (cf. John 5:21-27; 11:21-24, 25-26).

**Transition:** Practically speaking – what does that mean to you and me today? What does it mean in regards to hope and in regards to responsibility?

***In Similar Fashion To Jesus We Are Left Here To Be About The Work Of The Father –***

- Our hope is profoundly impacted by our understanding of that healing – The Jesus who stood before that man in that moment – simultaneously occupied the throne and carried the very heart of God to that pool and among those people. So too – the Jesus sitting on the throne is simultaneously and profoundly present – right here and right now – ***with the very same capacity/commitment for sympathy and with the very same heart of redemptive love and compassion!!!***

- Our responsibility in our culture is the defined by what this moment implies. He has left us here as those who would bear the very heart of God to our culture and who speak the very words of God and do the very works of God (cf. 1 Peter 4:7-12).

\*To pursue holiness out of love for God. To celebrate his healing rightly meant that he had to see it as a temporal work of physical healing based in an eternal and redemptive work of atonement – being made sin for us.

\*To be among the people of the world as those who see one another as the Father sees us – to “be present” in the same manner as Jesus was present at the pool of Bethesda. Jesus “presence” was redemptive in its focus and at its very foundation. There are no “throw away” or “faceless” people (cf. John 1:29; 3:16-17; 12:47; 1 Timothy 1:15; 2:3-6).

\*To love sympathetically and with redeeming force

\*To pour grace out into our culture in the power of grace that Jesus poured out into our lives