

HEALING ON THE SABBATH

GOSPEL OF JOHN (pt. 5)

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Jesus leaves the region of Galilee and travels up to Jerusalem. There was a pool there known as Bethesda. Here, many sick people, blind, lame, and paralyzed gathered at this pool hoping to be healed.

The water was known to have some type of healing properties. However, as indicated in the text, this may not have been extremely effective. There was a certain lame man who had been there thirty-eight years hoping to be healed. With no one to place him in the water, day after day he would just stay by the pool with hope seemingly fading.

Although this healing, or sign, is an important sign, the account becomes much more about Jesus' healing on the Sabbath than a man who has been healed. Later in (Jn. 9), John records a similar sign, a blind man is healed on the Sabbath being told to wash in the pool of Siloam. Here, in (Jn. 5), we find the first of several controversies concerning Jesus and the Sabbath.

TEXT

JOHN 5:1-17 (NASB)

“After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 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, [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.] A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight

years. 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?"* 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."* Jesus **said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk."* Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day. So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, *"It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet."* But he answered them, *"He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Pick up your pallet and walk.'* " They asked him, *"Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up your pallet and walk'?"* But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place. Afterward Jesus **found him in the temple and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you."*The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them, *"My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."*

LONGING FOR RELIEF

This man, somewhat like the woman at the well is looking for relief through the water. Jesus asks the man, what may first appear a curious question, **"Do you wish to get well?"**. It seems like the obvious answer would be **yes!** Notice his response, *"...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."* (Jn. 5:7). We can understand the response. All these years, day after day, this pool has been his only source of hope, it's all he knows. Have we ever been in a similar situation? Places where problems just seem to persist?

At this pool are the marginalized, the stepped over, those pushed to the side, out of sight and forgotten. This is the community Jesus seeks and the person Jesus has come to see. Jesus' words are simple, "Do you want to be made well?"

JOHN 5:8-9 (NASB)

*“Jesus *said to him, “Get up, pick up your pallet and walk.” Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk.”*

In our lives, sometimes all we see are problems. It's not to say they don't exist, but like this man, are we seeking solutions from the right source? We can get so focused on persistent problems that we miss the One who is standing in front of us.

LARGER PICTURE

The sign is where things take a turn. However, let's notice a larger narrative taking place. Going back to (Jn. 3), Jesus compared Himself to the bronze serpent Moses lifted up in the wilderness (ref. Jn. 3:14). In (Jn. 5), we are given the time marker of a “festival of the Jews.” Although we don't know which festival this was, the festivals kept by the children of Israel centered around the Exodus when God delivered them from Egyptian bondage. In (Jn. 6), is the powerful teaching of Jesus as the “bread of life.”

The background and larger picture throughout this section of John's gospel are the Exodus, God's deliverance, and entrance into God's promised land.

MY FATHER IS WORKING

Jesus says to the lame man “Take up your mat and walk.” However, with these simple words, the controversy begins.

JOHN 5:9-10 (NRSB)

“Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day. So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet.”

Instead of praising God for the man's healing, the religious leaders are more concerned about their rules. They had narrowly defined the word "work" and what constituted work. I am reminded of Jesus' teaching in (Matt. 5-7), the "Sermon on the Mount." There, one of the things stressed by Jesus is keeping the letter of the law without understanding the meaning or intent of the law. This seems to be what is happening here also. Instead of praising God for this healing and the man's restoration, they are focused on the letter of the rule. It seems a bit foolish when we look at it like this.

How often do we do the same things? It can be really easy for us to get caught up in rules forgetting the intent and purpose of the rule in the first place. How many arguments have we seen in the church because someone is not following the rules as we understand or define them?

The religious leaders were focused on the rules. Jesus had healed a person on the Sabbath, someone who had been unable to pick up his bed and walk for thirty-eight years is now able to walk. The reaction of the Jews is to persecute Jesus.

JOHN 5:17-18 (NASB)

"But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." Jesus' Equality with God For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

CONCLUSION

Jesus is not against the Sabbath, He is reshaping an understanding of the Sabbath. Some had misunderstood God's mercy, love, forgiveness, and grace. As Jesus said, "My Father is still working, and I also am working." We can become focused on rules such that we miss the intent of God. God is always working for restoration and reconciliation. As followers of Jesus, this should be our focus as well. Problems exist

and we can become consumed by them. However, we should not let persistent problems distract us from the One who stands before us, Jesus. Are we looking to the right source or do we place our hopes in a shallow pool?

New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995)