

The Healing at the Pool

John 5:1-15

Warm-up Question: Share a time when you needed and received help from someone. How did they help you and what were your feelings toward them afterwards?

¹ Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. ² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. ⁵ One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?” ⁷ “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.” ⁸ Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” ⁹ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, ¹⁰ and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.” ¹¹ But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’” ¹² So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?” ¹³ The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. ¹⁴ Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. ¹⁶ So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. (John 5:1-16).

Bethesda Hospital

The scene in this chapter takes place at a pool of water near the Sheep Gate which is generally accepted to be on the north side of the city of Jerusalem, outside the city walls. Jesus is in Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews (Verse 1). We are told that the pool is called Bethesda, which means, “House of Mercy.” The Pool of Bethesda has been found and excavated and accepted as the genuine site. It is a rock-cut, rain filled cistern 55 ft. long X 12 ft. across, and is approached by a steep and winding flight of steps. There is still evidence today of the five covered colonnades mentioned by John after all these years.

John describes a scene of total misery with a great number of people just lying there. How many would constitute a great number? More than a hundred, do you think? When one tries to picture the scene, I imagine them all as close to the water’s edge as they could get, cramped and huddled together, desperately waiting for any movement of the water. The New International Version (NIV) takes out verse four which explains the reason why they gathered there because it is not in the earlier manuscripts. Verse four in the King James Version says, “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 (John 5:4 KJV).

It sounds from the description that it depended on how quick a person could get into the water after ripples of water appeared on the surface. Was the angel actually seen? It leaves us with many questions....was this the mercy of God towards this mass of humanity just lying there? Maybe that’s why it was called Bethesda, the house of mercy. Perhaps, in their desperation, the faith they had in the fact that God would heal in this way, was the reason that they were healed. God answers desperate and faith filled prayer. However, it does seem that if only the first one who could get into the water after it was stirred was healed, it is obvious that some people would be at a serious disadvantage. If everything depended on how quick a person could get into the water, the closer one was when the ripples occurred, the better their chances of getting healed. We don’t know how often this rippling of the water happened but their attention was on watching the water and diving in quick when the water was stirred or rippled.

There are three categories of sick people mentioned that were lying there: the blind, the lame and the paralyzed (verse 3). The blind could not see the water being stirred. That would be their disadvantage to knowing when to jump in, especially if they were only waiting for a ripple. Others would jump in before them. The lame and the paralyzed could see what was going on,

but needed help getting into the pool. How frustrating it would have been to have people jumping over you to get into the healing waters! The longer a person was there, the closer they got to the edge of the pool and the nearer to their healing. One wonders how long some of them stayed there, hoping for their chance to be healed. How did they eat or relieve themselves or take care of their bodily needs? Surely they would not want to give up their choice positions beside the pool. Perhaps some people had friends and families help them and bring provisions or help to clean up after the constant throng of people waiting at the pool. However, we can also imagine that it was dirty and smelly. It certainly would have also been a place of great despair, with so many people having extreme needs enough to bring them to this place. It could also be assumed that there were many deaths that took place at that pool while people waited, as well as bitterness and fights breaking out among them if some people were pushed out of the way or prevented from getting in the pool before others who were stronger. And yet Jesus was there, amidst the smell in this mass of desperate humanity. We are told in verse 5 that the invalid who was healed had been in that condition for thirty-eight years! No matter how many years he had been there, or how near to the waters edge he could get, he had no one to help him get into the water before others.

This man had been lying there in that condition for a long time; why did he stay? What do you think his emotional state was? Where do you go when you are hurting emotionally?

I wonder about his emotional state. Thirty-eight years is a long time. Had he been there all that time? Did he come back and forth, making constant pilgrimages to and from his home? He does state, in his short conversation with Jesus, that he had no one to help him into the pool. How much hope did he have left by the time he met Jesus? Had he prayed? Had he cried out to God in the midst of his anguish? What did he place his trust in? His focus and hope seems to be in the mercy of God sending an angel every now and again, hoping that one day he may be the favored one to be healed. One thing we do know, the Father had seen this man and sent Jesus to help him. In that way, he was about to finally experience the healing mercy of God. God cares for the one who has no one to care for him or her. In this case He sent His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to care for him. We are not told that the Lord healed any

others that were by the pool that day, the presumption being that he was the only one. The only information that John tells us is:

⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?” (verse 6).

You Are Known of God

The picture we get is of Jesus’ attention suddenly focused on this one man amidst all the others. Somehow he learned that the man had been there a long time. We do not know if this knowledge came from others around the pool, or a divine revelation from the Father, which Jesus often had. He may have asked the man how long he had been there. All we know is that the Father gave Jesus this knowledge about the man, and He knew that it was now time for this man to receive his healing. Jesus always did what He sensed and “saw” the Father doing. This was a moment which we could call a divine appointment. Yet Jesus does not heal Him without first talking to him and asking him an important question. In these verses, we see a beautiful example of how Jesus walked in the Spirit as He went about doing what He knew to be the will of His Father.

Was this knowledge revealed to Him because He was God in the flesh or was it because He was being led by the Spirit of God? Did Jesus know all things while He walked on earth?

A number of times in the gospels, we see that Jesus did not always appear to have total knowledge of every situation, and sometimes we see Him asking questions to find out information about a person’s condition. For instance, when He came by boat across the Sea of Galilee to the region of the Gerasenes, a demonized man ran toward Him. We read that Jesus asked the man his name. The demon spoke through the man, saying; “My name is Legion.” Jesus used this knowledge to command the evil demonic spirits out of the man, freeing him. If he knew the name before, scripture does not indicate this. It seems that Jesus was led by the Spirit to ask for this information (Mark 5:9). When He came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, He was confronted by a man whose son was demonized. He asked him, “How long has he been like this?” (Mark 9:21). When His disciples asked Him about His return to earth and the sign of His coming, He told them that, “no one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, **nor the**

Son, but only the Father” (Matthew 24:36). Personally, I believe that since He is now seated at the right hand of the Father, He does know the hour when He will be coming, but while He was on earth, he did not know. He was one hundred percent God while on earth, but He was also one hundred percent man, and limited to time and space by His Father. Jesus had to experience what it was like to be truly human. He had to learn things while he was growing up, and He did not have all knowledge given to Him in all things. During His time on earth, Jesus laid aside many of the aspects of His nature as God. Paul tells us in his letter to the church at Philippi that:

⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ **but made himself nothing**, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8 Emphasis mine)

This passage tells us that Jesus made Himself nothing in the incarnation. The Greek word, *kenoō*, means to make empty, to be without content, to abase, to neutralize, to be made ineffectual, and to empty something of its power. The action results in the loss of ability for something to accomplish its purpose.¹ While Jesus walked on earth, He depended on the Spirit’s leading and empowering, just as you and I have to. In John’s gospel just a little further on from the passage we are studying, in verse nineteen, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does (John 5:19). We can infer from this verse that Jesus looked around at all those lying there and the Father focused His attention on the one invalid man giving Him supernatural revelation that the Father had seen him, knew all about him, and wanted to heal him. Once the Father had shown Him what He wanted to do, Jesus asked the question:

“Do You Want to Get Well?”

Why do you think Jesus asked him if he wanted to get well? Wasn’t that why he was there?

There would be many changes that would come to his life as a result of him being healed. Jesus knew this. His healing would change almost every aspect of this man’s

life. He would truly have to start living. No longer would people extend charity to him, he had to stand on his own feet. The responsibility would be on him to find work and be a regular part of society again if he answered in the affirmative and was healed. This question goes to the heart of many of us—do we want to be healed, do we want to be changed? Do we want the power of God to be operative in our lives? The most important thing in receiving God’s power to heal or to change your life is the intense desire for it. Jesus said the same question to the blind man, Bartimaeus, in Mark’s gospel, chapter 10. When Bartimaeus learned that Jesus was passing nearby, he screamed out to Jesus, “Son of David, have mercy on me” (Mark 10:47) as he staggered toward Jesus in his blindness. When Jesus called him into His presence, He asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Mark 10:51). The things of God come to us easier if we express our desire toward Him. He hears us in our pain when we cry out to Him for His help. The children of Israel were not delivered from Egypt’s cruel taskmasters until they cried out to Him:

⁷ The LORD said, “**I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out** because of their slave drivers, and **I am concerned about their suffering**.” ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians (Exodus 3:7-8).

Never give up crying out to Him in whatever pain you are going through. He does see and He does hear, and He is concerned about your suffering. Do not be content to suffer without crying out to God for healing. If we are quite content the way we are, we prevent change from coming our way. Contentment without God is one of the most dangerous things on planet earth. It can ruin a man or woman’s soul. God can use everything in our lives to turn our attention towards Him. Sometimes even sickness can be a gift of God when it wakes a person up from spiritual sleep, making him aware of his or her need for Christ. God can turn your suffering to your advantage. The difference will be in how you react to your suffering and if you choose to reach out to Him. How much desire have you put into being made well? How much desire have you put into being changed? Our prayer life, or lack of it, often shows whether or not we desire to know His power in our life. I don’t know why one person is healed of their sickness and others are left without receiving healing. We will only find out the answers to those kinds of questions on the other side of

¹ Key Word Study Bible, AMG Publishers, Page 1640.

this journey through life. Whatever situation you are in, pray and keep on praying. He will see your pain and be concerned about your suffering. You can take comfort in the fact that He knows, He sees, and He will reward faith in His way and in His timing.

Reasoning, Excuses or Obedience; your Choice

The man responds to Jesus' question by focusing on the fact that he needed somebody to stay with him and help him into the water when it was stirred. Sometimes we can limit God by thinking that God's healing only comes in certain ways. God can choose to heal through means that we understand; for example, through doctors and natural remedies that people have discovered. However, we must realize that God does also heal in a supernatural and spiritual way today. There are those that think that only a hospital can help them, or a doctor of medicine, and never think of asking the Lord Jesus for His help, persevering with Him in prayer. We limit ourselves from receiving what we need because we are focused on only one certain way it will come about. I am not advocating that people shun medical attention when it is needed, only that it is also important to be open to the fact that God heals today, and may choose to heal you if you would approach Him in prayer for your healing. Even if you are going to the doctor for a medical condition, I hope that you are also petitioning God for your healing, in whatever form He would deliver it. This man had the Lord Jesus Himself standing over him and he was asking for some help into the water! I wonder how many times Jesus has walked by us and we have not known it! This man was still looking for an angel to stir the water when the Lord Jesus, God Incarnate, was there to minister to him personally!

What can we learn from the fact that he did not even know Jesus?

Later on in the text (verse 13), we find out that the man did not have any idea of who it was that had healed him. He was caught carrying his bed roll by the legalist religious Jews. No praise was given to God on account of the man's healing, no sense of wonder or amazement at God's mercy, just criticism that he was doing something that they had not allowed; carrying his bed mat on the Sabbath. The legalistic Jews thought that carrying something on the Sabbath was defined as breaking one of the Ten Commandments, working on the seventh day. They wanted to know who it was that told him to pick up his bedroll and walk. Of course, not only in

their eyes was this man breaking the Sabbath by carrying his bed roll, but Jesus, in their minds, was breaking the Sabbath by healing a person on the Sabbath. How blinded we can be when we have a religious mind set! They were missing the whole point! The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). The wonder of this miracle, and the tender act of mercy God chose to bestow upon this man was not perceived by them. None of the other people that also lay there knew who it was that healed him either, otherwise they would have told the man. When the man was asked who healed him, he replied that he did not know. Scripture tells us that Jesus "slipped away into the crowd." He had been there "incognito" and had already slipped away (verse 13). This says a lot about the character of Christ.

His Motivation in Ministry

Jesus didn't do miracles and healings for any reason other than to relieve the pain of hurting people and to glorify and be obedient to the Father. Everything He did was at the behest of His Father. He didn't call attention to Himself; He simply healed the man to relieve him of his pain. Christ didn't even require faith in his true identity as the Son of God, for He didn't tell him who He was. He loved to do miracles and healings that His Father may be glorified. He did not seek to draw attention to Himself for selfish reasons. Matthew noticed this same attitude of Jesus, when he writes describing Jesus' ministry in this way:

¹⁵ Many followed him, and **he healed all their sick,** ¹⁶ **warning them not to tell who he was.** ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁸ "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. ¹⁹ **He will not quarrel or cry out;** no one will hear his voice in the streets. ²⁰ **A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out...**(Matthew 12:15-20 Emphasis mine).

Notice that He did not want for people to tell who He was. His passion was that His Father would be glorified for healing of the sick. Matthew, quoting the prophet Isaiah, describes His character as one that will not quarrel or cry out. He was not argumentative. He did not force people to listen to Him. He did not do a lot of shouting in the street and drawing attention to Himself. The descriptive term used is of a man helping a bruised or damaged reed bent over by the wind and straighten-

ing it out again. The picture is also given of a candle that is no longer aflame, but red at the end and the wick still smoldering. He will not blow it out, but will tend to it and fan it into flame again. It speaks of One who will heal and encourage those who are at the end of their tether, those who have no hope, those who are broken. He will come alongside and blow onto their lives and give them reason and a fresh hope and a future again. Shouldn't this cause us in the church to behave in the same way? We are to follow John the Baptist's example and get out of the way and give God the glory for all He does. We will be more like Christ when we don't draw attention to self, but seek to glorify God, as Jesus does.

This man had been an invalid for thirty eight years. He was told to do what was impossible to him: "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk" (verse 11). One thing is sure; the man received healing apart from his faith and understanding about Christ. He didn't even know who it was that was speaking to him, he simply obeyed. When he obeyed the words Jesus spoke, he received power, and healing flowed through his limbs. Most of the time, scripture shows us a different story regarding healing; the petitioner has faith in Christ which brings about their healing, or whatever they need to receive. This healing was a little different. To me, it seems like all this man had was some small amount of hope which was directed toward the potential of getting into the waters of this pool to receive his healing. However, he had been there so long, that his faith was like a tiny flame almost ready to go out. It was a slight whisper of hope, but he had been beside that pool for so long, it had become a way of life for him. Waiting was his life's work. When Jesus steps onto the scene, it appears that it is really a divine act of Christ in answer to this man's tiny spark of hope. He gives the man one simple instruction; to pick up his mat and walk. We do not know what went on in this man's mind but he was desperate and willing to obey, even the impossible command that Jesus gave him. We can only imagine that the man had a sense of the divine authority Jesus had when he spoke to him and gave him this impossible command. It seems that this man did very little, except to respond in obedience to the word of God. This was a big step for him, as he had been counting on the miracle of the pool as the means to his healing. Now in one command Jesus redirects his whole world view! This shows us that we cannot put God into a box and say that "this is how He heals", or this is how we will receive God's healing" every time.

He will surprise us by healing in immeasurable and surprising ways. God does not need us to understand His ways in order to receive His mercy and healing, but He does need our obedience when He speaks. He told the man to do the impossible, to get up and walk! To one He will say, "Stretch out your hand" (Matthew 12:13), and when the hand was stretched out it was healed. Another time he spat on the ground (John 9:6) and made mud of the spittle and put it on a person's eyelids and they were healed instantly. He also put His fingers into a person's ears for their healing (Mark 7:33). Yet another time He just spoke the word and a man's son was healed twenty miles away (John 4:50). We limit God by telling Him how we want it done; instead of opening our heart and mind to Him and saying, "your will, your way, Lord." He can work with a person who will simply obey when He speaks! This man was not healed because of his virtue, but because he obeyed the simple command given to him.

We are told that the man was instantly healed. There's no evidence that hands were laid on him or that Jesus even reached out a hand for the man to grab a hold of and get up. Nothing! Just words that are spoken! This is all that we are told. Imagine the scene. A word of command and it is done! The scripture says, "At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked" (verse 9).

How do you imagine the news of this healing, outside of the water was received by the many people around the pool when they learned that this man had finally been healed?

I think that the healing caused a commotion there beside the pool. John does not go in depth to describe the scene, but try to imagine it with me if you will. Don't you think that those there were shocked when they saw this man instantly cured? He must have made quite a commotion once he realized that he could walk. I imagine that he was ecstatically happy when he picked up his bed roll and was standing up for the first time in thirty eight years! Can you imagine what the crowd thought when they realized this man was healed and did not get into the pool? No wonder it brought the "religious police" to the scene, and I think that it was in a short space of time. There were two things they focused on immediately: what was this man doing carrying his bed rolls on the Sabbath? And when they heard the man's testimony, they immediately wanted to know who it was

that was healing on the Sabbath, which they viewed as a sin, classifying this act of healing as a person working on the Sabbath.

This passage of scripture also reveals to us that it is important to our Lord to follow up those who have been touched by the Lord's love. We are told that Jesus found him at the temple (verse 14). To be found tells us that Jesus made a search for him to give him some follow up instructions concerning his healing.

¹⁴ Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you" (John 5:14).

Why did Jesus talk to him about sin? Do you think sickness is the result of sin in every instance?

It is clear from scripture that sickness is not always the result of a person's sin. When confronted with the man born blind from birth, later on in the Book of John, the disciples wanted to know the cause of his blindness. They asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"³ "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened

so that the work of God might be displayed in his life (John 9:3-4). Sickness is not always the result of sin. But it does seem obvious from Jesus' follow up with the invalid that, in his case, his sickness was brought on by sin, and he should not go back into his sin, so that something worse would not happen to him. The Lord is concerned that we avoid the traps of the enemy and that we stay free from sin.

When were you last bruised or smoldering with little fire in your life? What happened? How did Christ come alongside? Or are you still in that place of being bruised? Are you ready to reach out for Christ's healing, even if it means your life will be different?

After people have had an opportunity to share their needs, it is recommended to close with a time of prayer at the end:

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for sending Jesus into our darkness and the pain of our lives. We ask you to come afresh to us today and heal those of us who have been bruised and been left as a smoldering wick. Fan us into flame again and give us newness of life. Amen!

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