

Jesus Heals a Lame Man

John 5:1-18

This event of Jesus reads pretty uneventfully as far as miraculous healings go, but when you take a longer, deeper look, this miracle holds at least six strange issues that have baffled scholars for centuries.

“Although opposition to Jesus smoldered beneath the surface, the story of Jesus’ healing at the Pool of Bethesda highlights the beginning of open hostility toward Him.” John MacArthur

“After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ² Now there is (historic present) at Jerusalem by the sheep market (Lit. - sheep gate) a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. ³ In these lay a great multitude of impotent (weak, ill) folk, of blind, halt (lame), withered (paralyzed), *waiting for the moving of the water.* ⁴ *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 5:1-4 (Italicize mine)

I. The “Intriguing” Setting

- **Strange Issue #1** “feast of the Jews” – John, the writer of this gospel, gave the name of at least four feasts Jesus attended but did not name this one. It is simply called “feast of the Jews.” This is our first odd point in the text.
Several scholars thought it was Passover and if so, would mark the end of Jesus’ first year of active ministry. Other feasts were also suggested. We can’t know, and John must not have thought it important to his purpose. Remember, John chose only seven miracles for his account so we “might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:31) Sometimes too many details get in the way of purpose.
- Pool of Bethesda – In 1888, archaeologists found what is believed to be the Pool of Bethesda. It had a covered porch area with five arches. It was near the sheep gate, a small opening in the north wall of Jerusalem, spoken of in Nehemiah 3 and 12. There are several possible meanings to the word Bethesda – House of Mercy, Olives, Grace, Two Outpourings.
- **Strange Issue #2** “troubled the water” – At the time of Christ, the Pool of Bethesda was well-known for its healing waters. The second oddity of this miracle comes in verses 3-4. It actually is a textual question. The last part of verse 3 and all of verse 4 is not found in the best, older transcripts. Without fail, it was a matter of discussion in all commentaries and study Bibles. It is agreed that a scribe inserted these phrases as a word of explanation for the lame man’s comments in verse 7. So what do we do with the phrase, “*an angel went down at a certain season*”? Here are the three possibilities:
 1. **Local Legend** – Several commentaries felt it was a supernatural legend not based in fact. There were probably healings but was a matter of physiological hopefulness and not true healing.
 2. **Mineral Spring** - An ancient witness wrote of redness in the water at certain times of the year. It is believed the pools were supplied with a spring that would occasionally bubble with high concentrations of iron and salts.
 3. **Angel from God** – There was an argument that in God’s mercy He did send an angel down from heaven and heal people. Warren Wiersbe felt that this “great multitude” of handicapped people would not be there unless something truly extraordinary happened from time to time.

I guess I tend to believe it was a local legend that caught the hopelessly ill and injured into false hope. Perhaps that is why no one was with this invalid man. Most people didn't believe it and felt it was a waste of time to sit there.

“And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case (condition), he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? ⁷ The impotent (sick) man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. ⁸ Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. ⁹ And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.” John 5:5-9

II. The “Unusual” Healing

- “infirmity thirty and eight years.” – Please realize, this is a long time! He was an invalid before Jesus was even born! How old do you think this man was when he met Jesus? Almost 60? He would be closer to Joseph, Jesus’ earthly father’s age. After that many years, there would be no more improvement to his ailment. Whatever his problem, his life would be lived out in this condition or maybe it would even become worse as he aged. This man would have been a beggar at worst or at best a burden within his family unit. Sadly over 38 years, probably he had outlived some of those who had lovingly cared for him. On this day, what was he doing? He was sitting alone gazing at the pool.
- “Jesus saw him lie, and knew” – Here we see Jesus’ supernatural knowledge of this man. He knew all about him. Ps. 139:1-2 But also, we see Christ’s sovereign initiative (Jesus made the first move unlike many other healings where the sick came to Jesus). In this covered courtyard, around what is believed to be two pools of water, lay a “great multitude” of weak, injured, and sick people. Jesus knew about all of them! But here Christ sought out this invalid and, in His wisdom, chose him from the rest to be healed!
- **Strange Issue #3** “Wilt thou be made whole? – In other words, “Do you wish to be made whole?” or “Do you want to get well?” What an interesting and even odd question for someone who was sitting at a pool believed to hold healing qualities! Why ask this? Think, what was this man doing? Where was he looking? What had his attention? It wasn’t on Jesus, instead, it was on the still and probably mirky water of the pool. Jesus had to call his attention away from the wasted gaze and get this man to look at Him! Jesus took the initiative and spoke! Please notice, this was a simple question! It really required a yes or no answer! We would think the invalid would answer with an enthusiastic “YES!” Instead, this man gave an incredible essay of excuses!
- “I have no man,” – How helpless, sad, hopeless, frustrated, lonely, and powerless this man felt! He was totally dependent on others, and he had no man! He could not help himself and he had no one that cared to make certain he made it to the water first! Think back a few weeks to the event of Christ, where a paralyzed man had four friends willing to bring him to Jesus. Nothing would stand in their way of getting their friend to Christ. Today, this man, by his own admission, had no one to stay and help him into the water. He was very much alone. There was no one to help him.

- “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole,” – Jesus did not react to his long, sad excuse. Instead, immediately healed him! The Greek words of this phrase are very strong! “Get up!” Christ the Messiah, the Creator of the world, recreated this man’s body with His word! He went from not being able to pull himself around to getting up and carrying his mat. This proved he was completely made whole and strong!
- “same day was the sabbath day.” – John is setting the stage for Jesus’ confrontation with the Religious Leaders concerning the Sabbath day.

Jewish Sabbath – **God’s Command** - Israel was strictly commanded and often reminded they should keep the Sabbath. (Ex. 20:8-11; 35:1-3; Neh. 13:15-22) It was generally understood rest was to implied one's employment. The Old Testament didn’t stipulate what kind of activities was prohibited. It was a day of rest from work for every man, servant, and beast. **Man’s Restrictions** - Over the centuries the Rabbis added 39 “petty details.” They took the sabbath, God’s gift to man, and transformed it into a heavy burden and prison of regulations and restrictions. Carrying a burden – wearing false teeth, putting a needle into your garment, writing with a pen; Reaping – pulling out a grey hair; Building a fire – putting out a lamp; No Medical practices – except to prevent death; Tying knots – only two types were allowed. These types of rules and traditions had quenched the desire for God and worship. The sabbath was completely marred by man. The heart of love and service to God as the Scriptures taught had been replaced by man trying to obey long lists of laws and regulations. **Jesus’ Target** – Jesus took aim at the Religious Leaders and their misuse of the Sabbath! It was supposed to be a day of blessing, good, and rest, not a burden. Seven miracles are recorded done by Christ on the Sabbath! Jesus did not break the sabbath, doing good was allowed but He disregarded the oral law, “traditions of men.” (Matt. 15:1-9) He was the Lord of the Sabbath, He had created it! Mark 2:27-28; Matt. 12:7-8 The Religious Leaders had made God and service to Him about rules and details, not mercy and righteousness!

“The Jews (Religious Leaders) therefore said unto him that was cured, **It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful** for thee to carry thy bed. ¹¹He answered them, **He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk.** ¹²Then asked they him, **What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk?** ¹³And he that was healed wist (knew) not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away (Lit. - escaped, withdrew, slipped, moved away, dodged), a multitude being in that place.”
John 5:10-13

III. The “Sacred” Sabbath

- **Strange Issue #4** “it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.” – The man who had not walked for 38 years was observed by the pious Religious Leaders walking! But it wasn’t the fact that he could walk that caught their eye, it was that he was carrying his mat on the Sabbath! It’s ridiculous to think that these men were so worried over the letter of the law that instead of rejoicing over this man’s wonderful healing, they actually called him out and scolded him over their petty law! This is hyper-legalism at its greatest! It didn’t faze them at all that this man’s life was wonderfully changed by the power of God!

- **Strange Issue #5** “He that made me whole,”/“wist not who it was:” – Quickly the healed man became the subject of dispute. Again, he makes excuses blaming his Healer who had told him to walk and carry the bed and he hadn’t gotten his name. Evidently, because he was not the instigator of breaking the law, they let him go.

“Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. ¹⁵ The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole.” John 5:14-15

IV. The “Stern” Warning

- “Afterward Jesus findeth him” – Jesus found this man in the Temple. This was no accidental meeting! Why was he there? We cannot know for sure, but here are some possibilities: 1) He went to offer sacrifices, worship, and thank God for the miraculous event in his life – he had not been allowed in the temple for 38 years! 2) This would have been the instruction given by the Religious Leaders after finding him carrying his bed mat. He would have been told to offer a sin offering for his offense. Just as in the story of the blind man healed by Jesus in John 9, Christ found him later. But there are stark differences between the reactions of these two men whose lives had been restored to them by Christ! (John 9:35-38) Here we find Jesus giving the formerly lame man a very stern warning.
- “sin no more, lest a worst thing come unto thee.” – Literally, the statement of Christ would read, “See, you are permanently well again, now sin no more, lest a worst thing (undefined consequence) happen to you.” What would be worse than 38 years an invalid? How about eternity in hell! D.A. Carson’s commentary on John, said this to say about this statement, “The unavoidable implication is that the bad thing that has already happened was occasioned by the sin which the person must not repeat.” He went on to say, “some ailments are the direct consequences of specific sins.” Carson finished the thought by stating his belief that Jesus chose this invalid out of all the others because his illness was tied to a specific sin! Ladies, if this is so, what mercy and grace was demonstrated by Jesus! Christ gave this man a second chance in life! Let’s remember sin has inevitable consequences (Gal. 6:7-8; Rom. 2:5-6), but not all illness is the direct result of sin (John 9:1-3; 11:4; Luke 13:1-5). But the Scriptures do teach that some illness is a direct result of sin (I Cor. 11:29-30; James 5:15).
- **Strange Issue #6** “told the Jews that it was Jesus” – When the formerly lame man found out it was Jesus who had healed him, he went and told the Religious Leaders. Earlier, they had asked him who it was, he hadn’t known, but when he did, this man returned and told them.

“And therefore did the Jews persecute (Gk – constant persecution and pressure) Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.¹⁷ But Jesus answered them, My (own) Father worketh hitherto, and I work. ¹⁸ Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.” John 5:16-18

V. The “Beginning” Persecution

- “sought to kill him,” = “done these things on the sabbath day.” – Jesus’ healing should have proved He was the Messiah (Isaiah 35:4-6), instead they overlooked it, and desired to kill Him for doing this and other miracles on the Sabbath. How blind and ridged in their thinking!
- “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” – It seems there was a meeting between Jesus and the Religious Leaders. This was the first confrontation with an official group of Religious Leaders. “But Jesus answered them,” has the idea of a formal setting and questioning. He will use several arguments concerning healing on the sabbath during different occasions, but this defense plainly set Himself equal with God (John 5:17)! Centuries before Rabbis admitted that God did not keep the Sabbath. He had rested – or stopped creating in Genesis 2, but He still held the world together and watched over His creation. Psalm 121:3-4 tells us God “neither slumber nor sleep.” Later, God’s seventh day of rest will be cited as an illustration to the Jews when setting up the sabbath day rest but it was not a necessity for God to rest. Here Jesus is saying, “My own Father is always at his work to this very day.” Jews may say “Our Father” but never “My Father.” And Jesus went on to say He does the same, always works. They would have caught this statement, and knew Jesus was making Himself equal with God! Their reaction of hate and murder is plain! Is.40:28
- “sought the more to kill him,” = “making himself equal with God” – The Religious Leaders' fact-finding on Jesus was done; in their mind, He was condemned as a sabbath breaker and blasphemer!

Jesus will go on to give to these Religious Leaders, one of the great Christological discourses in the Scriptures found in John 5:19-47. This will be our next study!

Believers Application:

The Life Application Bible has this note about the invalid man of this miracle. “After 38 years, this man’s problem had become a way of life...He had no hope of ever being healed and no desire to help himself. His situation looked hopeless. But no matter how trapped you feel in your infirmities, God can minister to your deepest needs. Don’t let a problem or hardship cause you to lose hope.” This man had his eyes fastened on a pool that had nothing for him. Even if it did, he couldn’t attain it! In fact, within the whole crowd of invalids, no one recognized the Healer of Galilee, their Messiah. You would think at this point of Jesus’ ministry someone in the multitude would have known Jesus! Someone would have cried out, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” someone would have run before Him and thrown themselves down and begged for healing. You would think a line would have formed around the pools, through the porches, you would think that almost a riot would have started as they realized it was the Jesus of Nazareth that walked among them, but nothing occurred! Why didn’t these hopelessly sick and injured people see Him? Why did none of this happen! Because it seems that every single one of them, had their eyes fixed on something other than Jesus! They believe that pool would bring healing and with-it happiness. But too many times it’s not much different for us! We too can get our eyes off of God and His riches and put our eyes on things of this world. Money, a mate, children, a better job, a new or better house, another degree, all of these are just empty; they cannot bring true happiness and fulfillment. Only Jesus can! Ps. 4:7; 16:8-10, 34:8-10; John 15:9-11; Phil. 4:4-7; Rom. 15:13

Four areas we must have right before God:

1. Belief in Christ as Savior – Seeking to Follow Him (can't have joy and fulfillment any other way!)
2. Quick to repent and obey God – Scriptures I John 1:9 (sin steals joy)
3. Walk daily in faith, trusting God – Heb. 11:6
4. Consistent Growth throughout earthly life – one never become perfect on this earth, but we actively seek to put away known sin and please God. Phil. 3:7-15

A host of ill and invalid people had their eyes on a pool that could do nothing for them! We must be careful not to live the same way, with our eyes on empty things of this world. Instead, we must keep our gaze on Jesus! Only He can give true peace, joy, and fulfillment!

2. Knowing Jesus picked this man from many sick and injured, healed him, found him later in the Temple, and warned him concerning his sin, what does this show us about Christ? This miracle has several issues that cause students of the Scriptures to wonder. But the strangest to scholars, and I have to agree, was the man's reaction to Jesus and why Jesus bothered with him at all! Here are some comments and quotes I found as I studied this event of Jesus:

- When Jesus meets him: negative, unfriendly, gloomy, hard to engage, makes excuses rather than a straight answer; doesn't seek to learn Christ's name
- When questioned about carrying his bed: he blames his healer.
- When going to tell the Religious Leaders it was Jesus that had healed him at the expense of Jesus' safety: "guilty of dullness rather than treachery." "this was contemptible self-protection revealing a spirit of base ingratitude." Sheperd p. 156; "slow-witted dullard;" simpleton; desired to please Religious Leaders at Jesus expense
- When meeting Jesus in the temple - demonstrated religious duty but no conversion; nothing is mentioned about repentance or sins forgiven though we know his plight was sin related; no words of thankfulness to Christ for healing

I know chronic illness can affect the emotions and mental health of an individual. The internet is full of sites that give supporting information to this fact. I found these characteristics consistently in articles: persistent sadness, anger, irritability, a high risk of depression, or excessive moodiness. But this is no excuse for the healed man's spiritual coldness and dullness.

Let's face it, this miracle is an amazing lesson of God's character of grace and mercy extended even to an unthankful, unrepented soul! We all know the sad fact, that this very grace and mercy is more often rejected than received. But think of all the wonderful acts of God given to us every day! (*Work together as a group and build a list of God's grace and mercy found in those at Bible Study – examples – salvation, comfort, protection, answered prayer, peace, joy, leading...*) But I'm afraid we are all guilty of being "slow-witted dullards"! Throwing the grace and mercy of God extended to us back into His face. Whether in the form of unconfessed pet-coddled sin; holding on to bitterness and unforgiveness, or pushing on through life without seeking God's will, we too are showing ourselves to be a "slow-witted spiritual simpleton!

God desires us to be 1) A Follower and Believer in Jesus Christ as Savior. Confessing our inability to come to God anyway but through Christ's death. 2) Walking daily and seeking to follow His ways – be in the Bible and obeying His Words It would have been reasonable and expected for the healed man to thank, protect, and follow Christ as Messiah! That is why we were all surprised when he did the exact opposite! But let's not do the same – let's be a living sacrifice for Christ, which is our reasonable service! Romans 12:1-2