



John 5:1-18

Who is Jesus?

Jesus saw a thirty-eight year old man lying on his mat at the pool of water at Bethesda. Because He cared about the man, Jesus was willing to pay a high personal cost to heal him. Jesus performed a miracle or “sign” as the apostle John called them. These “signs” always pointed to the supernatural power of God in His redeeming grace. From John’s perspective there was always a deeper meaning behind the supernatural act of healing. The act of healing was of secondary importance. The purpose was to help people recognize that Jesus was from God. It reveals a deeper profound truth about the person of Jesus Christ. Behind the sign is the Son of God.

In the healing of the paraplegic man we see a sign regarding Jesus as sovereign over the moral realm of man.

Jesus cared, and He paid the price. From this day on the religious leaders were determined to kill Him.

THE SIGN (5:1-9, 14)

Jesus was in Jerusalem for a religious feast. He went to the northeast section of the city near the sheep gate, and a pool which is called Bethesda with its five porches around the pool (v. 2). Near this pool lay a multitude of people who were “sick, blind, lame, withered” (v. 3). The pool of water had an interesting tradition and superstition attached to it. A spring at the bottom of the pool bubbled or percolated at certain times and caused an air bubble to rise to the top. The superstitious Jews believed that when this bubbling of the waters happened that an angel had come down into the water and brought with him healing power sufficient to cure the first person who was able to get in the pool after the waters bubbled. However, there would be enough power to heal only one person at a time. It was a ridiculous and cruel superstition, but when you are down to your last chance you will go for anything. In their desperation you can see in your mind’s eye the water suddenly moving, or gushing forth, and the people scrambling and pushing to be the first one to get in and hopefully be healed. Perhaps this is where we get the pagan idea that “God helps those who help themselves.”

Jesus seems deliberately to approach a certain man who had been a paraplegic invalid for thirty-eight years and asked, “Do you wish to get well?” (John 5:5-6). Out of that miscellaneous group of sick people He chose the one with the greatest need of the Great Physician. Jesus did not wait for the man to approach Him. He took the initiative to help the helpless man.

No one to help

Can you imagine the effects of thirty-eight years of helplessness on a person’s physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual well-being? How do you think it would have affected you over such a long time?

psychological and spiritual well-being? How do you think it would have affected you over such a long time? What may appear as a dumb question on second thought is very penetrating. There are "secondary benefits" to being ill. A lot of people do not want to get well. It is easy to get a lot of attention and pity. Self-pity sets in and the "põor me" syndrome takes over. Worst of all is the benefit of not having to assume any responsibility for the problem or the solution. Some people loose hope over a long period of time. That is why we often hear calloused people say, "God helps those who help themselves."

The response of the lame man was, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me" (v. 7).

This man was absolutely derelict. What do you do when you have no man to help you? If you look only to men you are desperate.

Healing words of Jesus

Jesus didn't pay any attention to the man's whine. He told the man to do the impossible. "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk" (v. 8).

The man's bed was a mat or pallet of straw, easily rolled up and carried on the shoulder. Jesus told him to pick it up and "walk about."

The man had to be healed before he could get up and walk. Jesus spoke and the man was instantly and completely healed. The man responded and received power to get up and walk.

The man no longer needed to be carried from place to place.

Jesus told the man to do the very thing he couldn't do. He told the man to do the impossible. That is what He always says. He brings the soul face to face with the one thing that seems impossible and commands him to act at that point. He brings us to the one thing that paralyzes us, and then enables us to do that thing we cannot do. This is still the way God does things. Go ahead, do the thing you fear the most.

What is the impossible thing you face today? Has the Master issued an impossible command to you? Do you feel lame? Do you feel paralyzed at the idea of doing the impossible?

The apostle John tells us, "And immediately the man became well, and took up his pallet and began to walk" (v. 9). At once the man was cured. This man was permanently healed.

Verse fourteen tells us the man was restored physically and spiritually. A little later Jesus found the man in the temple and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may befall you." "No longer continue to sin." Goodspeed translates, "Give up sin."

This man had been living in sin. It was his lifestyle. Jesus commanded him to

This man had been living in sin. It was his lifestyle. Jesus commanded him to make a break with his sin.

Jesus goes a step further and tells the man that something worse than physical illness is in the making if he does not repent.

In this man's sickness some sinful life-style caused the illness. Do not continue to sin any longer. Montgomery translates, Do not go on sinning, lest a worse thing befall you. Phillips says, Sin no more or something worse might happen to you. The permanence of the suffering was the result of his continuing to sin.

Note very carefully that this man could not help himself. Only the divine power of Jesus Christ enabled the man to rise and walk. This was a miracle that Jesus performed at the pool of Bethesda.

This miracle is a remarkable illustration of the spiritual condition of every individual. You and I cannot help ourselves spiritually; our salvation depends upon the grace of God alone. Just as this physically lame man could not help himself we are utterly helpless in our sinful condition to influence our salvation in any way.

Those disabled individuals lying at the pool were without strength to help themselves. John describes them as blind, lame and paralyzed. The poor man said to Jesus, 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 (v. 7). How sad is the man who knows only man.

This is a vivid and valid description of our human depravity without Jesus Christ. Spiritually, we are sick, blind, lame and withered.

Without Christ we are lame spiritually

Like the lame man we are weak, helpless, and powerless as described in Romans 5:6. While we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. "Helpless. The original word means, infirm, feeble, unable to achieve anything great, destitute of power among men, sluggish in doing right. "

When Jesus arrived at the pool no one rose to greet Him because they were powerless. No one reached out his hand to greet Jesus because they were paralyzed. However, we do see Jesus moving among them and healing the most helpless and lame sinner.

The Bible makes it emphatically clear that God does not help those who help themselves. He helps the helpless. He provides for the powerless.

We are powerless to stop sinning without the work of the Holy Spirit indwelling us (2 Pet. 2:1-6). We are lame spiritually without the saving grace of God.

God demonstrated His love toward us at Calvary when we were altogether unlovely. Christ died for us when we were utterly helpless. When it was impossible for us to do anything for ourselves Christ came and died for

we were utterly helpless. When it was impossible for us to do anything for ourselves Christ came and died for us on the cross. There is nothing we can do for ourselves to satisfy a righteous God.

In Mark 2:1-5 we have a helpless man who could not come on his own. His friends tore open the roof and lowered him to the feet of Jesus. He needed for someone to bring him to Jesus.

What a powerful commentary on our human depravity when Jesus explained, No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him (John 6:44).

Without Christ we are spiritually blind

Men and women without the illumination of the Holy Spirit cannot understand the truth of God (1 Cor. 2:14). The word of God, and salvation by grace alone by faith alone in the death of Christ, are foolishness to the spiritually blind. They are spiritually blind to the truth of God in Christ.

Moreover, we are spiritually deaf until the Spirit of God enables us to hear the truth of God. That is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (John 8:43).

Jesus told a great Jewish religious leader, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). The kingdom of God is a spiritual realm. It cannot be seen with the physical eyes. But to the spiritually regenerated He gives sight.

On another occasion Jesus healed a man who had been born blind and then explained to the hostile religious leaders that they were spiritually blind to spiritual things as evidenced by their refusal to believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God (John 9:39-41). The healed blind man saw Jesus, believed and worshipped Him (vv. 37-38).

How can we walk in the narrow spiritual path of righteousness if we are blind? And if our friend is spiritually blind we both fall into the ditch. Spiritually blind people are following every form of blind spiritual guides who disguise themselves as angels of light.

Men are spiritually blind until the Holy Spirit opens their eyes. The blind could not see Him moving among them until He touched them.

We are spiritually lame because we are spiritually blind.

Without Christ we are paralyzed spiritually

Moreover, there is a spiritual paralysis that takes hold of a person who has never come to Christ. We know to do right, but find ourselves feeling paralyzed, and it impossible to do what we know to be the right thing to do (Rom. 7:18). We know to be like Christ in our behavior, emotions and actions, but are powerless until Christ releases us from our bondage. It is like someone or something has a strange hold over us.

What is the solution to such a terrible disease? Christ came to bring healing to the blind, lame and paralyzed spiritually.

God s 'sovereign saving grace saves sinners who are blind, powerless and paralyzed. If our eternal salvation depended upon us who could ever be saved? Surely not I. What I need is His saving grace. We do not have strength to pull ourselves up. We cannot save ourselves. Instead of waiting for us to rise and come to Him for salvation He comes to us, opens our eyes, releases us from the hold Satan has over us, and raises us up

salvation He comes to us, opens our eyes, releases us from the hold Satan has over us, and raises us up together to be with Him (Eph. 2:5-7). The Søn of Man came to seek and save that which was lost (Lk. 19:10).

I thank God every day that Jesus came to seek me out because I was blind, lame and paralyzed. It would be an insult to God for me now that His grace has intervened in my life to stand and brag about what I have done. The spiritually sufficient will never be saved. You and I can never change our spiritual condition, but God in Christ can.

My sins have been dealt with in the blood of Jesus Christ, and He has graciously given me new life through faith in Him. Has Jesus Christ done the impossible in your life?

Why is this miracle so important? Because behind the miracle is the sign. This miracle took place on the Sabbath (v. 9, 16). It forces us to ask who is this Jesus who healed the man and saved him. Who is it that tells us to do the impossible?

THE SABBATH (5:9b-16)

The apostle John tells us Jesus was in the habit of healing on the Sabbath. The only problem was you didn't do that in Israel during the time of Christ. There were hundreds of regulations that governed the Sabbath day in order to help the people keep it holy. Healing the sick, even by a word of command was considered work by the Scribes and Pharisees.

Don't miss the picture. One of the conditions of the man being healed was to pick up his pallet and go home which was a violation of the Sabbath law. The paraplegic man immediately became well, and took up his pallet and began to walk (v. 9). He grabbed that thing up and took off. Can't you see him with joy jumping and skipping with that bedroll under his arm? Have you been around anyone like that lately? They will fill your heart with overflowing joy. Or will they?

There was a group of religious leaders standing around watching to see if Jesus was going to heal on that Sabbath. They approached the man carrying his bedroll and said, "It's the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet" (v. 10). The only thing these Pharisees could see was the mattress! They never saw the healed man who had been lame for thirty-eight years. They still don't. They still see law, but never grace.

You picked the wrong day for doing good

The religious leaders ganged up on the poor fellow. "It's the Sabbath; you can't do that on the Sabbath. You can't carry your bedroll on the Sabbath." "

That wasn't the real problem. The Lord of the Sabbath was the problem for them.

The healed man responded to the interrogators, "He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Take up your pallet and walk'" (v. 11). What else would you say to a man who has been lame for so long a time? Hey, man this is the Sabbath. Sorry, but you can't enjoy this great day of healing in your life. You just rest right there until tomorrow.

Who did this act of mercy?

The Pharisees knew where they were headed with their questioning. Who is the man who said to you, Take up your pallet, and walk? The poor guy didn't know who had healed him because Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place (vv. 12-13). After Jesus met him in the temple the man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him (v. 15). Did the grace killers take advantage of him and manipulate him? Was he even aware of whom Jesus was before that day? I get the sense that there was a spiritual battle going on, and he probably wasn't even aware of it.

At first it was an unknown, anonymous person who healed the man. The lame man did not know who it was (v. 13). There is something absolutely beautiful about that statement. Jesus did not put on a great healing show for the folks in the audience. In fact, only one person was healed that day. Were there not others who were lying about the edge of the pool sick, blind, lame, withered ?

THE SON (5:17-18)

Jesus invaded the moral realm when He told the man, Behold, you have become well; do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may befall you (v. 14).

Who said to the lame man, go and sin no more? It was the Savior. Yahweh is salvation. It is not just physical healing, but spiritual healing that had taken place. You will call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). That is what He came to do. That is what He was doing that day by the pool. How tragic if we see only a physical healing and nothing more. How even more tragic if we only see a man breaking some religious leaders' rules for the day.

The religious leaders were incensed. It aroused a murderous hatred in their hearts for Him. For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath (v. 16). Jesus was in the habit of doing these things on the Sabbath. He persisted in doing these things on the wrong day. They pursued Jesus with hostile intent to molest, harass, to chase like a wild animal, to track it down and kill it. It was a steady, continuing persecution of Jesus. This was no isolated incident. They would pursue Him until they killed Him at Calvary.

In this healing Jesus was claiming to be equal with God the Father. Jesus was saying that He is the Lord of the Sabbath. The religious leaders clearly understood Jesus' claim to equality with God.

Jesus' defense rests on His intimate relationship with His Father. God cannot break the Sabbath. It was impossible for the Lord of the Sabbath to break the Sabbath. Jesus consistently taught that He and the Father had the closest possible relationship. I and the Father are one (John 10:30). Immediately the Jews took up stones again to stone Him (v. 31). They understood perfectly the issues in the declarations of Jesus. Jesus was only doing what the Father is always doing. He is the Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus was insisting that He was equal with the Father.

I am just doing what My Father is doing

Face to face Jesus answered the religious leaders, My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working (v. 17). I am just doing what My Father is doing. I am about My Father's business. I'm doing what My Father does. I am doing what He told Me to do. The relationship between God and Jesus is a Father-Son relationship. The love of the Father and the obedience of the Son are perfect. The Son of God was completely controlled by the Father's love for Him.

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The response of the religious leaders was, "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 Him equal with God (v. 18). Isn't that amazing. They clearly understood Jesus' claim to equality with God the Father. Jesus kept saying that God was His own Father and they in turn were even more eager to kill Him for it.

What was the Father doing? He was giving eternal life. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. For not even the Father judges any one, but He has given all judgment to the Son, in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life (vv. 21-24). Jesus promises to give eternal life to those who believe on Him.

The Sabbath question deals with the most vital issues in a person's relationship with God. Why all this murderous hatred toward Jesus? Humanism stresses man's rules, human merit, man doing something for himself, man's virtues, appearance, performance and status. God's sovereign grace stresses man's depravity, sinfulness, judgment, salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The religious leaders wanted rules and regulations so they could merit a right relationship with God. See how good I am. Sinful man always wants to do something to influence a holy God. Keeping a holy day would mask their depraved hearts. God's ways are not man's ways.

My Father

That is the real issue. My Father, not our Father. "

This is the One of whom wrote Isaiah, "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

Jesus told His own disciples later, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father. . . Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak of My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works (John 14:9-10; cf. 5:18-23; 10:29-30, 37-38; 14:8-11).

The powerful message Jesus was driving home was that He alone displays the unique characteristics of God. This aroused a murderous hatred on the part of His enemies. It still does even in our day. You can say that Jesus is one of many saviors, or a good moral teacher, or one of many ways to get to heaven, and no one will be displeased, but that is not the option He give us. From this point on in the life of Jesus they were determined to put Him to death.

The world hates it when you tell them, "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Nothing has changed since that day Jesus proclaimed through the healing of the lame man that He is the Son of God, and the only savior of mankind. The unbelieving world shouts, "Be tolerant! However, the truth is there is no other name that will bring everlasting life. All other names whispered in your ear will send you to an everlasting hell.

Jesus and the Father's will can never run counter to each other. They are perfectly one in attitude, desire, goals, motives, volition and purpose. It is a unique Father-Son relationship. The love of the Father and the obedience of the Son are in perfect tune.

SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Since God is at work all about us we need to get a vision of God in His glory.

How tragic that religious people could get lost with a man carrying his bedroll and do not see the glory of God all about them. Here was a man suffering for thirty-eight years, and all they could see was someone breaking a religious rule. Don't get manipulated into becoming a grace killer. They are just as busy going about Satan's work today as they were in Jesus' day. When you see God doing something in a person's life, get out of the way and let Him alone get the glory. Everything He does is based upon His grace alone, and therefore He alone gets all the glory. Do we affirm the grace of God, or do we tend to be narrow, bigoted, nit-picking enemies of grace?

How can we be at rest when all about us are people suffering because of their sins?

Jesus saw hurting humanity, and He was willing to pay the price to get involved. Do you thank Him every day for His willingness to go to the cross and pay our sin debt? He cared enough to get involved in our sin problem.

When we have seen God the Son we have also seen God the Father.

To see one is to see the other. Our heavenly Father is a compassionate God who cares about you and me. He has demonstrated His love by sending His Son to die for our sins while we were still spiritually blind, lame and helpless. He extends His grace and mercy to each of us today.

Jesus has the authority from the Father to execute judgment and to give life because He is the Son of God.

Jesus Christ claims authority to give eternal life to all who call upon Him. But He also has the authority to judge all who reject Him as their Savior. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the son of Man (vv. 26-27).

When you see yourself as spiritually blind, lame and paralyzed you are qualified to find healing in the Son.

Two classes of people are seen in this passage of Scripture. One group was so self-possessed that they made a decision to kill Jesus. They were deeply religious. They thought they were doing the right thing. They even thought they were doing God a favor by killing His Son.

Of all the people there that day only one man was healed. He could not save himself. God does not help those who help themselves. He helps those who cannot help themselves. Too many people are trying to save themselves. Many are trying to add something to their religious life so they will be acceptable to God. It can never work because we are lame spiritually, blind spiritually and spiritually paralyzed by our sin and depravity.

Will you acknowledge your need today and cast yourself upon the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ? He gives life, eternal life to all who will come to Him. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear it shall live (v. 25). Is He speaking to you right now? Heed His pleading voice in your heart right now and believe on Him. Ask Jesus Christ to save you right now while His Spirit is speaking to your heart.

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