

EXPOSITION OF JOHN

Message #23

John 5:1-16

I read a story of a strong swimmer who was standing on a dock watching a man seemingly drown. A fisherman had been standing on the dock and has slipped and fallen into the water and was struggling to live. Someone watching this scene knew that the other man on the dock was a very strong swimmer and, after seeing the man go underwater twice, yelled, "Why don't you save that man?" Finally after the man went down a third time, he jumped into the water and saved him. When he got out, the strong swimmer was asked why he had waited so long to save the man. He said, "He was too strong before. I had to wait until his strength was gone. I had to wait until he could do nothing himself, until he was helpless."

One may be too strong for God to save, but one cannot ever be too helpless or hopeless for God to save. God delights in saving broken down helpless people who realize they are a helpless and hopeless sinner. Some believe when it comes to salvation that God helps those who help themselves. God only saves those who admit they cannot save themselves. He saves those who are helpless and hopeless. God does not and will not save people who see themselves as spiritually strong, pure and self-righteous. Because of this reality, self-righteous people often actually hate the true work of God and Word of God because it offends them and leaves them out. People love to piously play games in the realm of religion, however, very few really want a true relationship with Jesus Christ that faces truth about self.

If ever you want to see this principle, it is right here in this passage. In this text, Jesus Christ heals a man who has been paralyzed for some 38 years. It is an amazing miracle that only God could perform. But instead of the religious crowd rejoicing at this, they hate Jesus Christ and want to kill Him. The point to see is this:

JESUS CHRIST CONTINUALLY DEMONSTRATED THAT HE WAS GOD AND THAT HE IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN SAVE SINNERS FROM SIN, AND SELF-RIGHTEOUS RELIGIOUS PEOPLE WHO ARE FOCUSED IN THEIR OWN WORKS SYSTEM ACTUALLY HATE THIS TRUTH AND WILL TRY TO DESTROY THE ONE PRESENTING IT.

If you believe in the pure gospel of God's grace and you proclaim the pure doctrine of God's grace, you will be challenged and hated by the religious crowd who believes you may be saved by your works. You become a threat to the religious world, just as Jesus Christ was a threat to the entire religious Jewish world.

Now this is a wonderful passage of Scripture that contains a wonderful miracle. In fact, this miracle is very important to the life of Jesus Christ because this is the miracle that is a turning point in Christ's ministry. This miracle will put Christ-haters on his trail, as Dr. McGee said, like a bunch of "blood hounds." In chapters 5-8, opposition against Jesus Christ builds by the religious leaders of Jerusalem. These Christ haters will not stop until they nail Him to a cross. They already have Him on trial. **The thing that stirred this terrible animosity against Christ was His demonstration of the wonderful grace of God.**

There are two key actions that take place in this passage:

ACTION #1 – Jesus Christ performs a wonderful gracious miracle. 5:1-9

Now there are two main component parts to this miracle:

Component Part #1 - The setting of the miracle. 5:1-5

There are four facts which set the stage for this miracle:

(Fact #1) - Jesus went back up to Jerusalem because of a Jewish feast . 5:1

After spending some time in Galilee and healing the official's son, Christ went back up (elevation, not direction) to Jerusalem (2400 feet above sea level) because the Jews were having a feast. The group, "the Jews," often refers to specific Jewish rulers, who are against Christ. It may have been one of the main three festivals - Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles. Or it may have been the feast of Purim. If it was a Passover feast, then this would mean Christ went to four of them in Jerusalem (2:23; 5:1; 6:4; 11:55), while here on earth.

Now every time Christ goes to Jerusalem, something bad happens, which causes Him to lose favor with the self-righteous religious crowd. When God goes to His own city, He stirs up trouble with those not right with Him. On His first trip, He slammed over furniture in the temple and drove people out. On this trip, He'll heal a man on the Sabbath Day. Christ's goal was not to impress nor become popular with false religious leaders; His goal was to do the will of His Father.

We may expect that when we are where we are supposed to be, we will have some trouble. When we are focused on the Word of God and doing the will of God, we will be at odds with some people.

(Fact #2) - Jesus went to a place called Bethesda . 5:2

John is writing this Gospel at the end of the first century after Jerusalem had been destroyed by Titus in A.D. 70. However, the specific ruins of this place were there when John wrote and are still there today. This very pool can still be identified.

Bethesda means "house of mercy," and it was the name of a spring fed pool place in Jerusalem that was located near the north part of the temple, where the sheep were brought for sacrifices. The pool is 360 feet long, 130 feet wide and the spring is 75 feet deep. Those who have visited this place say there are two main large pools with five porches, four of which are alongside the pools and one which separates them. The porches each have a roof, which blocks those under it from the elements.

Christ could have gone anywhere, but the place He chooses to go is the place of down-and-outers, not the place of the religious or the intellectual, but to the place where the lowly hurting people are. We will be far more effective in a Christlike ministry, when we are reaching out to broken-down sinners, not the self-righteous, religious crowd.

(Fact #3) - Jesus found many people at the pool waiting to be healed . 5:3-4

Back in Jesus' day, the equivalent of millions of dollars was spent on Tombs, Temples, Baths, Pools, Theaters, but not much was spent on Hospitals. A health care program for everyone was unheard of in Christ's day. Great numbers of hurting people were at this pool, hoping to be healed. They are described in verse 3 as being "sick, blind, lame and withered." This was, as Dr. Arthur Pink said, a picture of the entire Jewish nation (*An Exposition of the Gospel of John*, p. 243). This is the kind of picture of people who are in need of God's grace.

Now there is a slight textual problem with the last part of verse 3 and verse 4. In some of the earlier Greek manuscripts, written before A.D. 400, this part of the text is missing. Some have suggested that this was a scribal marginal note added to explain why people came to this pool and that this marginal note was copied into the text after A.D. 400. What we do specifically know from all the manuscripts and the context is that many people did come to this pool, hoping they would be healed and we also know from **verse 7** that many did believe that when the water was stirred up, it did have medicinal benefits. I find it very interesting that all good English translations include these verses, even though the textual evidence is somewhat weak.

If an angel actually did do what is described in verse 4, then this was a special O.T. legal provision of God in the Law Dispensation. In other words, an angel would come and stir the waters and the first one in would be healed. If this is the case, then the angel came specifically to this spot as a prelude to Jesus Christ coming to this spot. If an angel actually did not do what is described here, it certainly was a strong superstition because many people went to this pool believing they may be healed.

It is very possible to conclude that an angel did do this as a special prelude to Christ's coming. For one thing, when the man tells this to Jesus in verse 7, Jesus does not say, you are all a bunch of delusional, nutty, foolish mystics. Furthermore, the text says a "multitude" (v. 3) of people were here, indicating something did happen, which many people knew about.

The description of the kind of people here is exactly the kind that Jesus loves to change. As Dr. H. A. Ironside said, "We are all like these impotent people gathered by the pool." We have all been sick in sin and blind to God. We cannot in and of ourselves walk tall and straight in the righteous ways of God. This is God's verdict of us all that we are sick, blind, lame and withered by sin and none of us are in any position to debate with God about this point. We were all spiritually dry and dead and that is exactly the kind of person Jesus Christ loves to touch. There is a fountain that can heal any sinner from their sins. It is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

(Fact #4) - Jesus found a man who had been sick for 38 years. 5:5

It was this crippled man who caused Jesus Christ to come to this place. Notice carefully who found whom - Jesus is the one who saw this sick man and who found Him. It was Isaiah who predicted that God would permit people to be found who did not seek Him (Isaiah 65:1).

I do not think it is a mere coincidence that the man had this problem for 38 years. This is the exact number of years that Israel wandered in a wilderness before getting close to the promised land (Deuteronomy 2:14). Israel was wandering in existence and Jesus Christ was now on the scene. He literally could give her the Promised Land, but she rejected Him and today she is still wandering in a barren existence.

The sickness must have been some type of paralysis (5:7), because he could not get into the pool by himself. **A paraplegic in Christ's day does not even begin to compare to one in our day.** In Christ's day 1) There was a great problem with mobility - there were no special wheelchairs; 2) There was a problem with livelihood, there were not special work programs for the handicapped person; 3) There was a problem with social isolation, there was no hope of anyone caring for you because you were considered to be an outcast; 4) There was the problem of personal hygiene, there were no nice restroom facilities and for the most part people avoided this kind of person. A person who has been in an invalid state for 38 years is a person no one cares about, and he is an ideal candidate for a gracious miracle of God because every person knew him and his healing would make a great impact.

God delights in saving people who have been sick in sin for many, many years. He delights in transforming those that others write off. By the way, one of the greatest things we can do for any disabled person is to tell them about Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the only one who can give them life and make them healthy and whole again. Even though the big push for disabled people is to get them into Special Olympics, which is a good thing, the greater emphasis should be to get them into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, because that relationship will guarantee them, one day they will be free from any physical, emotional and spiritual problem.

Component Part #2 - The specifics of the miracle. 5:6-9

There are five specific details of this miracle given to us by John:

(Specific Detail #1) - Jesus saw the sick man. 5:6a

Apparently, this sickness or paralysis was due to some sin (5:14). Perhaps the man had gotten drunk many years before and fell. Perhaps he was trying to rob someone and fell off a roof. We don't know exactly what had caused this but Jesus saw him in his sinful and sick condition. Jesus sees everyone in their sinful and sick condition. He knows the truth about everyone of us, so there is no sense trying to fool Him.

(Specific Detail #2) - Jesus knew the sick man. 5:6b

Jesus knew exactly how long this man had been sick. This man had never seen Jesus before this moment, yet Jesus knew all about him. Jesus is God. He knows you. He knows the number of hairs on your head, the number of sins you have committed and the number of years you have been alive. He knows more about us than we know about ourselves.

(Specific Detail #3) - Jesus questioned the sick man. 5:6c-7

Jesus asks the sick man an obvious question, which is designed to bring this man to focus his mind on his total insufficiency to be able to save himself. Christ wants the man to see himself as a helpless and hopeless sinner. Not only does this question cause the man to realize he can't save himself, it also causes him to realize no one else can help him either. **You cannot save yourself and no man can save you. The only person who can save you is God.**

In verse 7, the man responded by saying - I would love to be healed, but no one will help me and I cannot move to the pool fast enough myself and someone always beats me in before I can get there.

We will never see God do great things with us until we see our own insufficiency. No one will ever be saved until they see themselves as a helpless and hopeless sinner and often it takes a desperate circumstance to get one to see the fact that they need help.

(Specific Detail #4) - Jesus heals the sick man. 5:8-9a

Carefully observe the text - the man does not beg Christ to save him, Christ judicially says "get up" and "walk." The verb "get up" is aorist, which means this is a point in time moment and the verb "walk" is present, which means from now on this will be the continuous action, a continual state of being able to walk. Take your "pallet" (which literally means "camp bed"), take your bedroll and walk away. The moment one receives Christ, He judicially declares you righteous and you walk in the righteousness of God.

Notice verse 9, immediately this man was completely and instantly healed. No need for any additional physical therapy, no need for prescription drugs or a special diet. This was a total and complete healing. This healing totally contradicts the false faith healers who suggest that in order to be healed you cannot lack faith or have unconfessed sin. This man doesn't even know who Jesus is. But what we know and clearly see here is that Jesus is God.

When a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, they are made completely and instantly whole. They do not need a bunch of programs to deliver them, they are completely and totally healed. Forget the things behind and press on for God.

(Specific Detail #5) - Jesus healed this sick man on the Sabbath day. 5:9b

This was not a slip of Jesus' mind, this is intentional. He knew this man and He knew the day He was healing this man. In fact, Jesus will heal people at least seven times on the Sabbath day: 1) Heals demon possessed man (Mark 1:21-28); 2) Heals Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31); 3) Heals the lame man (John 5:1-18); 4) Heals shriveled man's hand (Mark 3:1-6); 5) Heals a crippled woman (Luke 13:10-17); 6) Heals a man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-6); 7) Heals a blind man (John 9:13-14). Jesus specifically chose to do this miracle on the Sabbath day and He knew this would rub these religious leaders the wrong way.

ACTION #2 – Jesus Christ is hated for performing this wonderful miracle. 5:10-16

Now “the Jews” (v. 10) were specific Jews who were religious leaders. They told the man that he couldn’t carry his camp bed on the Sabbath day. Truth is **religious legalists always zap the life and joy out of the real work of God.**

According to Jewish Rabbis, this was considered to be a violation of the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11), which is to keep the Sabbath day holy. Under the O.T. law, there were some Sabbath Day restrictions for Israel as a nation - 1) They were not to cook anything (Ex. 16:23); 2) They were not to gather manna (Ex. 16:26); 3) They were not to go anyplace (Ex.16:29); 4) They were not to do any kind of work (Ex. 35:2); 5) They were not to light a fire (Ex. 35:3); 6) They were not to gather sticks (Num. 15:32-35); 7) They were not to carry a load or bring anything into Jerusalem (Jer. 17:21); 8) They were not to load things on donkeys (Neh. 13:15). **The point of these Sabbath day rules was that this was to be a day in which the focus was on God and not on the normal business procedures of every other day.**

These Jews had invented more legal codes than God actually had and they were replacing God’s word with their man-made dogma. In the Mishnah, they had come up with 39 tasks which were forbidden on the Sabbath day and one of those man-made codes said you could not move your bedding on the Sabbath day.

Now notice what happens:

Verse 11 says the man said to them - the one who healed me told me to take my bed and walk.

Verse 12 says they immediately want to know who this man was who told them this.

Verse 13 says the man didn’t know who healed him, because Christ had slipped away.

Jesus is still passing by religious people today and they have no idea who He is. He is totally unnoticed by the Islamic, Mormon and Buddhist religions.

But carefully notice **verse 14**, Jesus found the man in the temple, where this man probably went to thank God. Jesus advised him not to get back into the sin again or else something worse could happen, namely he could lose his life.

There are some sins that do have physical consequences. Alcoholism can affect your liver; drugs can affect your mind; sexual immorality can affect your body. If God saves you and delivers you from this, do not fall back into those sins again or the results can be devastating.

Verse 15 says the man started telling the Jews that it was Jesus who made him well and **verse 16** makes it clear that the Jews are out to persecute Jesus from this point on. They envy His power and popularity and they hate His holiness. According to their hypocrisy, they couldn’t move a bed on the Sabbath day, but they could hate Jesus on the Sabbath day and plot against Him.

Why do they so hate Jesus Christ? Because He is God and His ways are not their ways. His grace doesn’t square with their works. So it is today with most religious systems of the world. They do not want to see themselves as people crippled by sin who cannot do anything in and of themselves to get out of their condition. They are proud and want to earn their own salvation and they miss what Jesus Christ has to offer. Don’t let that happen to you.