

The Miracles Of Jesus Christ: Healing A Cripple By A Pool (Part One)

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Jesus' healing of the crippled man beside the pool called Bethesda is one of nine healing miracles involving water and one of seven performed on the Sabbath. Only the apostle John records it (John 5:1-16). It is impossible to be sure when the miracle occurred other than it happened on a Sabbath day.

John's reference to "a feast of the Jews" (John 5:1) rather than a "feast of the Lord" (Exodus 12:14; Leviticus 23:2, 37) illustrates the spiritual decline that had occurred among the Jews regarding God's feast days. People may typically start out with God being central to their worship, but they end up getting in the way and become the main focus themselves. The people had made this festival a feast of the people instead of continuing it as God's feast.

In His journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, Jesus expended a considerable amount of effort to be there in time for this Sabbath. In doing this, He set an example in terms of spiritual priorities and the sacrifices involved in putting spiritual matters first. Some Christians are unclear about spiritual priorities, desiring a convenient religion that requires little inconvenience and no sacrifice. Frequently, those who complain most about not getting enough out of church are often those who attend sporadically and involve themselves the least in church activities. Jesus, on the other hand, took great pains to fellowship and to help the people, especially on the Sabbath.

1. Why does Jesus choose this location? John 5:1-2.

Comment: John writes, "[T]here is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches." *Bethesda* means "house of pity or mercy." Locals believed that the pool could restore health to the sick and infirm. The pool had five porches like covered verandas, open on one side but protected from the sun and rain overhead. The community kindly provided these porches to protect from the elements the invalids who waited for someone to help them to the pool.

In Scripture, the number five often represents grace, and it is grace that was given at Bethesda. Certainly, the grace and mercy of God provides the Lamb of God for our spiritual healing (John 1:29). The Sheep Gate is where sheep were gathered, so perhaps Christ, the Lamb of God, chose this location to aid in identifying Himself to the people.

2. Why does Jesus heal this particular man? Same verses.

Comment: Christ chose to intervene for this one man, but why him and no one else? More revealing, perhaps, is why He healed any of them. They were all sinners; none of them deserved to be healed. Whenever God chooses to heal someone, it is an act of compassion and grace, but it must also fit into His purpose and time frame. God hated Esau but loved Jacob (Romans 9:13; Malachi 1:2-3). Both were sinners, but God chose only one to accomplish a specific purpose. Jesus chose the crippled man to glorify God and in a small way advance His plan of salvation for all mankind.

3. What does this account tell us about the condition of sinners? John 5:3; Romans 5:6.

Comment: In this account, five physical details represent a sinner's spiritual condition:

- » First, some were too sick and disabled to walk to the pool. Sins are physically—and even more so—mentally incapacitating, keeping the sinner down emotionally and spiritually.
- » Second, some were too weak to do anything about their condition. Sin leaves people without the vigor and resources to overcome it.
- » Third, some were blind. Sin maintains spiritual blindness, producing a lack of discernment between right and wrong.
- » Fourth, some were lame or crippled. Sin debilitates so that one cannot walk uprightly in God's way of life.
- » Fifth, the limbs of some had withered and atrophied through paralysis. Sin paralyzes people's efforts to improve themselves, and without the power of God's Spirit, they are unable to produce the fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:21-22).

4. Why does Christ ask the crippled man, "Do you want to be made well?"—a question that would seem to have an obvious answer? John 5:6.

Comment: By being at the pool, the crippled man indicated that he wanted to be healed, yet Christ asks him if he wants to be cured. Why did He not just heal the man? Frankly, some ailing people do not want to get better because they like the sympathy and attention they receive. When asked how they feel, some of them launch into a laborious, nauseating account of every ache, pain, and bodily function they experienced the previous week! They thoroughly enjoy describing their sickness no matter how long it takes.

Applying this spiritually, some people really do not want to be made well, using their illness as a reason not to make any effort of devotion to God or to overcome personal failings. In a milder example, some who have nothing contagious will often miss Sabbath services, yet they will show up for a social that evening or a sports activity the next day. It is really an issue of the heart, of sincerity and commitment to God. What ranks highest on our spiritual priority list? Do we really want the help God and Christ have to offer?