

## I. Jesus, the pool of Bethesda, the lame man

A. John 5:1-17 . . . After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. [2] Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. [3] In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, [waiting for the moving of the waters; [4] for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.] [5] A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. [6] When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, "Do you wish to get well?" [7] The sick man answered Him, "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." [8] Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk." [9] Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day. [10] So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet." [11] But he answered them, "He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Pick up your pallet and walk.'" [12] They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up your pallet and walk'?" [13] But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place. [14] Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you." [15] The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. [16] For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. [17] But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."

## B. Pray

## II. Jesus heals the sick man

A. John 5:1-4 . . . After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. [2] Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. [3] In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered,

[waiting for the moving of the waters; [4] for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.]

1. The word Bethesda – means House of Mercy
2. The five porticoes – a portico is a covered, often columned area – and it is assumed this is what provided shelter for those waiting by the pool.
3. There is some question whether the portion in brackets (the second half of vs 3-4) – about an angel stirring the water followed by a miraculous healing – was actually put there by John, or added later.
  - a. However, since it makes no difference to the purpose and value of the story, we won't spend time talking about it.
  - b. What is important about the part in brackets is that it provides an explanation of what the lame man meant when he said he had no one to put him into the pool when the water was stirred up (vs 7).

B. John 5:5-6 . . . A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. [6] When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, "Do you wish to get well?"

1. One of the people under one of the covered porches was a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years –
  - a. We don't know for certain what sickness this man had. What we do know is that the sickness prevented him from moving fast enough to get into the pool before anyone else.
  - b. It is almost certain this man was a Jew, which means he was one of God's chosen people. Therefore, it is probable he saw himself as someone who ought to be experiencing the provision and protection of God.
    - (1) Yet in spite of being one of God's chosen people, he had been in this sickly condition for 38 years.
    - (2) And though we don't know how long this man lay under one of the porticos, it is probable he had been there for many years. And though the hope of healing was nearby, it is probable he felt there was little, if any hope of being healed. And though it is probable he had immediate and extended family somewhere, no one cared enough to sit with him until the waters were stirred in order to get him into the pool in time to be healed.

- (3) In other words, he was alone, and his situation was almost, if not entirely, hopeless, from his human perspective.
  2. Though few of us face this kind of debilitating illness for this long, most of us face difficult, trying, and even painful situations that drag on and on – with no apparent hope of ever getting better.
    - a. And it is true that these kinds of circumstances can easily feed a general distrust of God, and a questioning of God's love and goodness, and a seemingly overwhelming sense of hopelessness and despair, along with feelings of loneliness or abandonment, and even an undertow of anger or bitterness.
    - b. So what are we to do?
      - (1) The first and foremost thing is to continue trusting in God, in His love, and in His goodness – in spite of the painful and unchanging circumstances.
      - (2) Second, believe that God is working to bring a great good out of your situation, and treasure the fact that the greatest good He is bringing to you is stronger faith, greater holiness, and further conformity to the likeness of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:28-29).
      - (3) Finally, decide to treasure and therefore hunger for the spiritual growth that will come to you because of your circumstances.
        - (a) Of course, you will have to respond to your circumstances in a godly manner, but if you do, you not only will be satisfied with spiritual growth, you will discover that the growth achieved brings the kind of blessings that fill you, and satisfy you, and bring you joy, and draw you closer to God.
        - (b) In fact, you will discover that what you gain so overshadows what you have lost that you will become thankful for the painful circumstances that brought you the gain.
  3. Jesus said to him, "Do you wish to get well?"
    - a. Considering the situation this man was in, why do you think Jesus asked him if he wanted to get well? Here again, we can only speculate because we don't know for sure.
    - b. However, it is possible Jesus was giving the sick man an opportunity to reveal his mindset and his attitude through his response.
    - c. And that is what the sick man did, as recorded in vs 7.

- C. John 5:7 . . . The sick man answered Him, "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."
1. The first thing I want to point out is that the sick man did not give a direct answer to the question – such as a “yes” or a “no.”
    - a. Instead, he gave an explanation – the essence of which expressed his frustration over the hopelessness of his situation,
    - b. and expressed his sense of abandonment,
    - c. and showed that he thought of himself as a victim of his circumstances.
  2. What I hope you will consider – in relation to his response – is how often you are tempted to not only feel the way he felt, but also tell why your situation is hopeless, and that you feel abandoned by everyone – including God (though you may not utter His name), and that you are a victim of your circumstances.
    - a. I am bringing this to your attention because one of the devil’s wiles is to get you to feel sorry for yourself – because if he can get you to feel sorry for yourself, he can get you to turn your heart away from God and toward self-pity, which in turn feeds ingratitude and distrust toward God.
    - b. And as I pointed out last Sunday, whenever and wherever we distrust, we take matters into our own hands, step outside God’s boundaries of godliness, and do what we can to fix our situation or soothe our pain or protect ourselves from being a victim.
  3. You see, even though we believe in God and trust in God – at least to some degree – Romans 1:21 tells us that some of the first steps we take in moving away from God –
    - a. Is to step back from honoring Him as the good, loving, perfect, all-powerful, all-knowing God that He is,
    - b. And to step back from gratitude for all He is doing for us, so that we stop being thankful and we stop giving thanks.
  4. So once again, let me remind you that it is the devil who want us to interpret our circumstances in a way that prompts us to be dissatisfied with God and therefore pull away from God and feel sorry for ourselves.
    - a. God uses our circumstances to build confident faith in us, and to make us holy – and this He does when we cooperate with Him.
    - b. And how do we cooperate with Him? One life-changing way is described in James 1:2-4, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, [3] knowing that the testing of your

faith produces endurance. [4] And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

- D. John 5:8-9a . . . Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk." [9] Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk.
1. We see here the marvelous compassion, mercy, and grace of God in spite of the sick man's attitude or feelings or thoughts or even behavior in relation to his situation.
- E. John 5:9b-13 . . . Now it was the Sabbath on that day. [10] So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet." [13] But he answered them, "He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Pick up your pallet and walk.'" [12] They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up your pallet and walk'?" [13] But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place.
1. It is easy to condemn the Jews as being legalistic, or as following a works based religion.
    - a. But before you condemn them for that, I want you to consider that their legalism was not only a means of working their way to God and gaining eternal life – as if their best behavior could ever pay the penalty for sin.
    - b. Their legalism also gave them an easier way to look holy, to feeling accepted by God, and to having some assurance that they would go to heaven after they died – without having to be holy in all their behavior.
  2. And to help you think about this, I will ask you a series of questions.
    - a. Which is easier, not doing any unapproved work on Sunday, or loving your neighbor as yourself all week long?
    - b. Which is easier, managing your words and deeds well enough on Sundays or when you are with other Christians so that they look on you as a good Christian, or living within God's boundaries of godliness in your home, day-after-day?
    - c. Which is easier, creating a comfortable or safe distance from someone who has or continues to hurt you – in the hope of no longer having to deal with him, or longing for a healthy and meaningful relationship, and keeping the door open for such a

relationship, and doing your part by loving well even though he does not love you well?

- d. Which is easier, teaching others how to live a godly life, or living one yourself?
  - e. Which is easier, worshiping and praising God on Sunday and when listening to worship music, or worshiping and praising God in the midst of trials, tribulation, sickness, sorrow, and pain?
  - f. Which is easier, trying to make yourself look good by defending yourself and explaining that your intentions were good, or admitting guilt, making things right with those you have offended or failed to love, and returning to making an honest effort to live a godly life?
3. You see, it is easy to condemn legalism, but there is a part of legalism that we all are prone to give in to, and that part is “the easier way.”
- a. Matthew 4 and Luke 4 tell the story about Jesus being led into the wilderness for forty days. It was during that time that He was tempted by the devil.
    - (1) Though we only read about three of those temptations, we have enough information from those three to learn a number things.
    - (2) And one of those things is the devil’s efforts to lure us into taking a short cut, or a way that is easier than God’s way to
      - (a) either to obtain by our own doing what we are to trust God to give to us,
      - (b) or to gain an outward show or facade that makes it look like we are good Christians – that we are living according to God’s word and will.
  - b. My point is simply this. We can condemn the religionists in this story for being more concerned about keeping the Sabbath rules than healing the sick. But will we condemn, in ourselves, following the devil’s short cuts rather than taking God’s longer, narrower path to true godliness and eternal life?
  - c. And though you already know this, I want to remind you that following the devil’s short cuts always leads to losing what is precious, and it leads to death. It is only as we follow God’s longer, narrower, harder way that we gain what is truly precious, and that we gain life itself – here in this world and in the world to come.

### III. Conclusion

- A. We will stop here for today and pick up the rest of this story next time we meet.
- B. My recommendation for today is that you consider and even ask God to show you where you are taking short cuts to looking godly rather than following God's path to true godliness.
  - 1. And think about feeling sorry for yourself. Are there certain situations that recur or is there a person in your life that prompts you to feel sorry for yourself? Remember, that is the devil's way, not God's way.
  - 2. And finally, I recommend that you consider how well you practice or the sincerity with which you practice James 1:2-4.