

John, Part 15: Desire, Authority, and Identity

John 5:1 ESV After this 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, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. **3** In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. **5** One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. **6** When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” **7** The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” **8** Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” **9** And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

Now that day was the Sabbath. **10** So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” **11** But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’” **12** They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’” **13** Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. **14** Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” **15** The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. **16** And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. **17** But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

18 This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

- I. We are continuing our study of the book of John and the seven selected miraculous signs that Jesus performed.
 - A. We have already covered two of Jesus’ miraculous signs. Every sign that John records for us is for the purpose of demonstrating different aspects of the Kingdom of God that has come to earth through Jesus’ ministry.
 1. The first sign we saw was in chapter 2, when he turned the water into wine at the wedding in Cana.
 2. Two weeks ago, we talked about the second sign at the end of chapter 4. We saw how a government official came to Christ and asked him to come to Capernaum to heal his dying Son.
 - B. So today in John chapter 5 we’ll take a look at Christ’s 3rd sign in the book of John: the healing of the invalid at the pool of Bethesda.
 1. The setting of this miracle is a “feast of the Jews” - but we are not told which of their many annual feasts it was specifically.
 2. Also this is not the first nor the last time that John shows us important exchanges between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, with one of the Jewish religious feasts as the backdrop. We’ve already seen it in chapter 2, and we will see it again, particularly in chapters 7 and 12.

- C. But while he was in Jerusalem for the unnamed feast, the Bible tells us that he made his way to a pool called “Bethesda” that was outside the city walls, northeast of the city, near the sheep gate.
1. ‘Bethesda’ is an Aramaic word that means “house of mercy”. The Bible describes the pool in detail, saying that it had five roofed colonnades (or archways).
 2. It was in no way a resort, or a merciful looking place, but rather a place where there **“lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.”** So this pool is not for recreation or refreshment, but instead is more like an open-air hospital ward, out in the desert, where the worst examples of human suffering congregate.
- D. But I want you notice one other thing about this passage. When we read through it at the beginning, did you notice that verse 4 was missing? In fact, if you were to compare what we read to an old KJV(as well as a few other translations), you would notice that the last part of verse 3 is missing as well (most Bibles will have a footnote giving a reason for the omission).
1. So if you don’t have a Bible that includes it, here’s what verse 3 says in the Holman Christian Standard Bible: **John 5:3 HCSB** *Within these (the colonnades) lay a large number of the sick—blind, lame, and paralyzed[—waiting for the moving of the water, 4 because an angel would go down into the pool from time to time and stir up the water. Then the first one who got in after the water was stirred up recovered from whatever ailment he had].*
 - a) The reason this verse is omitted from most of your Bibles is because it is not found anywhere in the earliest manuscripts that we have of the gospel of John. That’s why the HCSB places the portion that is omitted within brackets.
 - b) Additionally many of the words used in the passage are found no where else in any of the writings of the Apostle John. Because of this, people who study and compare the early manuscripts have determined that this verse was not part of John’s original writing and therefore doesn’t belong in the New Testament.
 2. So what happened? If it doesn’t belong, how did it get there? Did someone simply add or subtract from God’s Word willy-nilly? Probably not. Scholars believe that it is likely that this passage was inserted after the original writing to offer a bit of commentary and clarity on verse 7, where it speaks of the water being “stirred up”. (we’ll get there momentarily).
 3. Most likely, the reference to the Angel occasionally visiting the pool of Bethesda, to stir up waters and heal the sick is merely a reference to a local Jewish superstition, even it could be proven to have a basis in historical fact.
 4. But I hope you’ve seen throughout our study that John was not at all concerned with legends of angels or folklore...he wanted to point people to **the** healer and **the** savior who **had** come (not might come occasionally!).
- II. So at the pool there is an unknown amount of people present (John merely says “a multitude”). But look what the next couple of verses say: **John 5:5 ESV** *One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6a* **When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time...**

- A. John says that a multitude was present, but “one man was there” and this “one man” caught Jesus’ eye! Compare this to **Matthew 8:16 ESV** *That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and **healed all who were sick.***
 - B. So we see that it was not uncommon for Christ to concern himself with the big picture; with large groups and mass miracles. But here (and other places as well) we see something more tender about Jesus that should offer hope and encouragement to the hurting. Jesus puts all his attention on **one invalid**.
 - 1. The term invalid captures how this man must have felt... “In-Valid”! After 38 years, the sound of laughing children, or the sight of people in love, or of people busily working at their trades offered no encouragement or hope to him, only cruel mockery, pointing to a life he would never know.
 - 2. But John says **“Jesus saw him lying there and knew”**. He knew who he was, where he had been, what he had suffered and for how long. Though many were moaning and writhing in their suffering around the pool, waiting for an angel to come and stir up the waters so that they might be delivered, the Son of God fixed his attention on this one man.
 - C. This morning, you may very well feel like “one of many”; just a face in the crowd. But you’re so much more than that! Jesus sees you and he knows who you are, where you are and how long you’ve been there! Whether your crisis has lasted a day, a month or 38 years like this poor man, Jesus knows, and he is looking upon you with tender compassion!
- III. Oddly enough, though undeniably drawn to the man, Jesus didn’t just lay hands on him and heal him, he didn’t do anything seemingly miraculous that would have drawn attention to himself or the man.
- A. As absurd as it seems, he looked at this crippled man, living in poverty with an ineffective body for 38 years, and began by asking him a question. **“Do you want to be healed?”**
 - 1. What kind of thing is that to ask? Can you imagine yourself approaching a double amputee in a wheelchair and saying, “Care to go for a jog?”
 - 2. It is an absurd question! And yet, Christ asks it without apology...
 - B. What if Christ were to ask you this morning (whatever it is that is lacking in you), “Do you want to be healed?” How would you respond? Believe it or not, healing is oftentimes risky! It involves honesty with yourself, and reliance on Jesus alone and a willingness to lay down every crutch and dependency. Sometimes it’s just easier to lay there by the pool, begging for alms where no one expects anything more from you.
 - 1. Sometimes it’s easier to cling to our addictions, fears and grudges, because we think they are soothing, or give us a sense of satisfaction, than it is to be healed.
 - 2. Sometimes it’s easier to just stay right where we are, rather than trust that Jesus is able to change us and make everything new. It’s easier for us not to pursue healing than to risk humiliation if nothing happens!

- C. Even the man at Bethesda makes excuses to Jesus. **John 5:7 ESV** The sick man answered him, “Sir, *I have no one* to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going *another steps down before me.*”
1. “It’s just not fair, Jesus! Every time it looks like the angel shows up to churn the water, some yahoo pushes ahead of me to take my healing!” But Jesus wasn’t interested in blame shifting, or tall tales of itinerant angels. He is only concerned with how you will answer his question in the here and now.
 2. Do you have excuses? Jesus still asks, “Do you want to be healed?” He’s not asking if you’ve tried your hardest or if you have some reasonable defense for the way you are, his concern is with what you desire at the center of your being. He’s asking, “Will you trust me to be the source of it?”.
 3. **Hebrews 11:6 ESV** And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
- D. So ignoring all of his excuses, Jesus looks him right in the eye and says, “**Get up, take up your bed, and walk.**” And the Bible says he did just that, “immediately”! Now what happens next is fascinating. This story is not over yet!
- IV. **John 5:9b ESV** Now that day was the Sabbath. **10** So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” **11** But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’” **12** They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’” **13** Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.
- A. Without even the courtesy of a proper introduction, Christ instantly heals the man and slips away into the crowd. So when the local Mosaic Law police find the man carrying his mat on the Sabbath they throw a penalty flag!
1. When the man says, “I’m just doing what I was told to do!” Their question is, “Who told you to do this?”
 2. They care more about the fact that a rule has been broken, than the fact that there is someone in their midst who has the authority to heal a man who was paralyzed for 38 years!
- B. One of the hallmarks of religion is obsession with the rules, as opposed to relationship with the liberating, healing, saving, all-powerful God of the universe! Because of their devotion to the rules (Jesus said they strain out gnats and swallow Camels!), they missed the fact that God was in their midst!
1. Don’t get me wrong, the rules are very important. They remind us that God is perfect, holy and just. But Jesus came to rescue us precisely because we were irreparably broken, and unable to keep the rules!
 2. So God in his mercy came, not to enforce the rules, but to fulfill them for us! It is those who insist on the rules that are condemned to live by them.
- C. **Galatians 5:4 ESV** You are *severed from Christ*, you who would be *justified by the law*; you have *fallen away from grace*.
1. Grace and the law are like oil and water! You cannot mix them. You cannot have both. You must decide which of them to stake your hope upon.

2. In Galatians 3:2, Paul says that if we insist upon being justified by the Law that Christ “would be of no advantage” to us.
- D. Imagine that after being lost in the desert for two or three days you stumble upon a 5 gallon jug of cold, clear water.
1. But as you stand there, lips cracked and throat parched, you discover that someone has put an eyedropper full of pure cyanide in that water.
 2. You may still be thirsty, and the water may look promising and satisfying, but it is of no advantage to you. That’s the way it is with the law. It promises far more than it can ever deliver. It cannot quench your thirst or cleanse your conscience; it can only deliver you to death.
- V. **John 5:14 ESV** Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” **15** The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.
- A. Jesus finds him in the Temple and gives him a stern warning, that we would do well to heed. “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.”
1. Christ is addressing something that happens all the time. We’re in crisis and need healing or some other miracle and God grants it in his mercy. But as soon as he moves in our behalf, we forget him and return to building our own kingdom. But God always delivers us so that we can submit to his Lordship.
 2. Christ is not dangling a threat over the man as much as he is saying that though God heals and delivers us because he loves us, ultimately it’s to show glory and advance his purposes; if we are just using him to get relief so that we can live for ourselves, we are missing the point!
 3. The religious leaders denied Christ’s authority to heal on the Sabbath. Jesus is telling the man not to deny his authority to be his lord and not just his healer. After this the man tells the Jewish leaders who it was that healed him. They are just as sour and controlling as ever!
- B. **John 5:16 ESV** And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. **17** But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”
1. Remember, these guys lived for the rules! In fact you could say that they weren’t really worship God at all, but rather their concept of what they thought God wanted - a simple moralistic religion of right and wrong.
 2. **Matthew 15:6 ESV** “...for the sake of your *tradition* you have made void the word of God.”
- C. So in their minds, when Christ blatantly encouraged one of their captives to break the rules by healing him on the Sabbath, they immediately miss the fact that they are standing in the presence of one who heals the sick! They were literally denying his authority for the sake of their rules!
1. This is what it means when John said **John 1:11 ESV** He came to his own, and *his own people did not receive him*. They literally did not know or recognize him! Is it not odd that *not one* of them says, “Hold on a minute guys! A miracle has been performed in our midst!”

2. But Jesus won't play their religious game. Once when his disciples had been picking grain to eat as they walked through the fields, the Pharisees got their nose all out of joint. But do you remember what Jesus said to them?
Matthew 12:8 ESV "...the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."
 - a) If you would really know and follow Jesus Christ, you must acknowledge his authority, submit to his Lordship and stop trying to fit him into **your** religious, law-based, rule-keeping structure.
 - b) If you fail to see him for who he is, as revealed in scripture, you too will miss him at every turn.
 3. But not only were the Jewish leaders failing to recognize that the very Son of God was in their midst, the text says that because of his failure to play by their rules, they were **persecuting** Jesus!
 - a) Persecuting Jesus doesn't mean that they were in some way harming him, but that they were resisting him, his gospel and his purposes. This is never a wise posture to take!
 - b) But Christ, unintimidated, says to them, "**My Father is working until now, and I am working.**" He was saying to them that the Father sets his agenda, not their religious sensitivities.
- D. Do we ever persecute Jesus by demanding that he fit into our agenda instead of embracing his?

VI. **John 5:18 ESV** This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

- A. This verse shows us the tragic end result of denying Christ's authority, even as we watch him fulfill the desires of those who can do nothing for themselves.
 1. When we deny his authority, it is a foregone conclusion that we have missed his identity! The leaders were upset that he had broken the Sabbath, so they couldn't even fathom that he might be the Son of God, their Messiah!
 2. Jesus stands before you asking, "Do you want to be healed?" His offer and invitation is all that you need to concern yourself with. Don't worry if Christ defies your every expectation! When the finite meets the infinite, that is bound to happen!
- B. Say to him, like Thomas did, when he finally believed, "My Lord **and** my God!" Acknowledge that he is all powerful and can do anything he pleases! It is only then that you will really know him for who he really is.