

**Greater Works Than These**  
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**John 5:1-9**  
**November 20, 2011**

We come now to the third sign which Jesus did, and He did many more signs, as John tells us at the end of His Gospel, but we come now to the third sign that he records for us here in this Gospel, which is to show us the glory of our Lord. The third sign is the miracle at the pool of Bethesda. And this morning, we want to look at what Jesus did, the miracle itself. We want to look at *what* He did, and then next time we'll look at *when* He did it. You'll see there is great emphasis on both what He did – the healing itself – but also very important in the flow of the Gospel of John is when He did it, which was the Sabbath. We'll talk about that next time, Lord willing.

Now, the miracle itself. The great work and its significance. Remember, John's purpose is to show us, to prove a case before us, really, by presenting evidence. Look at the material evidence for the fact that Jesus is truly the Son of God, and that He wants to inspire faith, saving faith, in Jesus. So he brings this evidence sign by sign before our eyes for us to survey.

The first miracle, we saw in Cana of Galilee in Chapter 2, Verses 1-11, when he turned the water into wine. The second sign we looked at last week. The second sign in Cana is the second sign John records, the healing of the nobleman's son, where Jesus spoke, and a little boy sixteen miles away was healed instantaneously. And today we come to the third sign. Why is this one included? What does it tell us about Christ? How does it inspire faith? That's what we want to see this morning. Let's look at John 5. We'll read verses 1-9:

**John 5:1-9**

*1 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.*

Let’s pray together...

*Our Father, we come to Your Word with expectant hearts and hopeful hearts, that You would speak to us this morning by the power of Your Spirit, by the power of Your Word. We acknowledge our complete dependence upon You. Lord, unless You open our eyes, we will not see. Unless You open our hearts, we will not believe. We thank You that You are a God of grace and mercy, and we praise You in Jesus’ Name, Amen.*

The miracle at the pool of Bethesda:

We’re really looking at the big question, which is “What?” as in what Jesus did, and I want us to look at that. That’s the focus of our message. That’s what we’re going to get to, but I want us to begin carefully observing, and we’re going to use some questions, the five W’s and an H, to observe the text as we often do when we’re looking at narrative passages, particularly. And the first question we want to look at, the first ‘W’ we want to look, at is “When?”

1) When?

The first thing that we see in the passage is: *After these things there was a Feast of the Jews...* Now “When?” is going to become much more important later when he talks about the Sabbath, but right at the beginning, he introduces the issue of “When?” which is: *After these things...*

*After these things...* is something John uses from time to time in his Gospel. He’s used it at least eight times. At least eight times, he says: *After these things...* It occurs twice in this passage. Actually, the same word is used in Verse 14. “Afterward” translated in the NASB is “After these things”. John uses this when he wants to not specify a time. We saw last time when we looked at the healing of the nobleman’s son, that he was careful to say in preparing the context for that miracle: *After two days, he came to Cana.* Remember he’s trying to tie very closely together the healing of the nobleman’s son, and when he comes to Cana two days

after what? The two days he spent in Samaria. He's tying it together. Here, "After these things" basically means an undesignated amount of time. Some time has passed. Probably a few months. And so "he is come" is not just after these things. There was a Feast of the Jews. The Feast is mentioned. This is a key thing that John organizes his narrative around. As he's telling us about Jesus, he's constantly telling us about the Feast that Jesus went to. He records what we saw earlier in John 2. He went to the Feast of the Passover. Here He's now going to another Feast. In Chapter 6, we'll see again the Feast of the Passover. In Chapter 7, we'll see the Feast of Tabernacles. In Chapter 10:22, we see the Feast of Dedication.

Now, what's going on with that? One thing that's helpful to realize is that John is giving us a window, a glimpse of Jesus that really compliments the other three Gospels, which are sometimes called the synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They're called synoptic because they intend to give a broader synopsis of Jesus' life and ministry, more or less a collection of the big events all the way through. John's Gospel is not synoptic in that I think he tells it chronologically, but he picks and chooses much more selectively. He skips over a lot more stuff, and what happens is you have kind of a nice overlay. His Gospel comes later. It's the last Gospel written. It's probably written between 80 and 85 A.D., 50 to 55 years after Christ has ascended to heaven, a full 20 years after Luke wrote the last Gospel, and he was the third Gospel to write. Matthew and Mark, we believe, wrote in the 40's. So it was written much later.

John, the last living apostle, puts together his Gospel under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and he adds to and enriches our understanding of the glory of Christ. One of the things he does for us when you read the synoptics – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – is they all begin Jesus' ministry and predominantly focus on His ministry in Galilee, which was where most of His ministry happened, because we see that in John's Gospel as well. He was in Cana. He started His miracle ministry there. He goes to the Feast of Passover, He goes back to Cana and stops in Samaria on the way, and He's spending time in Galilee. But what John shows us that the other synoptics don't is how many times He goes down for the Feasts. He goes to Judea primarily to go to the Feasts. Why? Because the law required three times a year that you make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. For three major Feasts: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, you had to present yourself before the Lord in Jerusalem. And Jesus, living the life of a true Israelite under the law, being made under the law so that He might redeem those from the law, is fulfilling the law. So He's going down regularly to the Feasts. His primary ministry is back in Galilee, and John's hinted at why He's in Galilee.

Turn back over for a minute to Chapter 4:1-3. John had told us about Jesus' early ministry in Judea when He was baptizing, and then he tells us why He leaves. Look at Chapter 4:1.

***John 4:1 ~ Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John 2 (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were), 3 He left Judea and went away again into Galilee.***

What's going on there? He knew that the Pharisees knew that His popularity had overtaken the popularity of John. What's happening? He knows that opposition is going to be intense in Judea, and so He's moving back to the other Jewish territory Galilee where the opposition is not as intense, because the Pharisees don't dominate in Galilee like they do in the vicinity of the temple. And the Lord has got a three year ministry. In the providence of God, He's got to fulfill all of that teaching and do all of those signs. There are a lot of divine appointments that have to happen, and the crisis can't come too early. So Jesus is not running from conflict. The opposite is true. He never runs from anything, but for the sake of our salvation, it's not yet His time. That's why you'll find Him saying in the Gospels: *My time has not yet come. It's not yet time for Me to go to the cross.* Therefore, He hides Himself from the crowd sometimes. They were about to kill Him in Galilee. He gets opposition in Galilee too. It's not like it's roses up there. Not at all. They try to kill Him in His own home town when He preaches in Nazareth, but the opposition is more powerful because of the opposition and the hatred of the Pharisees – religious zealots – the theological conservatives of that day that have missed the point of the Gospel.

So in this idea of telling us about the Feast of the Jews, it's showing us Jesus keeps going down for the Feasts, because He's fulfilling the law, His obedience to the law. He mentions it's a Feast of the Jews. It doesn't tell us which Feast it is. That's not as important as that it's another one of the major Feasts. But he uses the phrase ***...of the Jews...*** and John uses this almost 40 times in his Gospel where you'll have a phrase ***...of the Jews...*** Back in Chapter 2, when he mentioned the Passover, he said in Verse 13 that the Passover of the Jews was near. John himself a Jew is writing to those of Jewish background. We believe when we look at the Gospel carefully, that he's writing to Jews of the Diaspora, those who have been spread about through the Mediterranean world, but they're not as familiar with Judea, though they may well have been there and probably have been at various Feasts.

Remember how many people are at Pentecost, because they try to fulfill, they try to make those pilgrimages when they can. Sometimes expense prohibits that, for many of these Jews are far away, but when you read Acts 2, you see they were there from Rome, and they were there from all over the world at Pentecost for the Feast when the Spirit came.

The Feast of the Jews, though, there's more to it. John is writing for Jews, but he's also throughout his Gospel, explaining why it was that the Jews rejected Christ, and encouraging faith. The message is, "Don't let this happen to you. You're of Jewish background. You've been close to these things. Don't let this happen to you." And we see how this applies to us, in that those of us who've been raised up in the Bible belt, many of you have been raised up in Christian homes, and the same temptation is there to be around the things of God but to not know the Lord. Well, John is exhorting people who have been around the things of God, to truly believe in Jesus. But he mentions 'Feast of the Jews'. At the beginning, he's always putting up this sense of this contrast, this opposition. Look at the opposition that comes, the irony. The place should be a celebration to the Lord, and what happens we're going to find at this Feast is this incredible opposition to God that's going to grow up because Jesus does a miracle for a man who desperately needs it. It should be a time of celebration, celebrating the Feast and celebrating the Messiah, but what happens is this tremendous opposition. So that's "When?"

## 2) Where?

Now, the reason he tells about the Feast is to tell us how Jesus got to Jerusalem.

***John 5:2 ~ Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool,...***

He's in Jerusalem by the sheep gate. The sheep gate is on the northern wall of the old city near the northeast corner. We believe the sheep gate is called a sheep gate, because that's where they brought the herds of sheep in and animals for the sacrifice, because the sheep gate, the pool of Bethesda just inside the sheep gate, is just north of the temple. So they would bring the sheep in, and on that route, as they would come into the city, there is the pool of Bethesda. ***...a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda,...*** So "Where?" is near the temple at the pool of Bethesda.

Now, there are some differences over exactly what Hebrew word is meant here. You may have different notes in your Bible, but I think that it's right to say that Bethesda is the right translation. It means 'house of outpouring'. It's a pool. It's a

house of outpouring. John tells us a little bit about it. It had five porticoes. It was a huge area. There were five porticoes (covered porches), collimated porches, where people could wait, and we find out in a minute that they were filled with a multitude of people who were sick and suffering. But this idea is he wants us to hear the word. It's Bethesda. It's a pool of outpouring. It's the house.

Actually, Bethesda itself means house. "Beth" is house. "Esda" is outpouring. House of outpouring. I think what's happening here is when you look at the broader things again, remember, John's chosen these events very carefully, and so you have this contrast being painted between the Jews who should accept Christ and who don't. You have this opposition, and you also have this contrast of the old way. Though God had given the old covenant, we're reminded of the inability of the old covenant to save.

Think back with me over the way John has presented Christ to us already in his Gospel. In Chapter 2, he tells us the story of Jesus turning the water into wine. And what you have there is he tells us in Chapter 2, Verse 6 that there were six large water pots there that held 20 to 30 gallons each. They were big water pots. But he tells us the detail. These water pots were used for the Jewish ritual, and he uses the term Jewish ritual of purification. That's an interesting detail. We didn't really need to know that. All we needed to know was that there were a lot of big water pots. Well, we did need to know that, because he wants to set up a contrast. Here you have the water of Jewish purification that just does not purify, and then you have Jesus the Messiah who comes in and takes the old water of Jewish purification and gives new wine, new joy. This is a contrast that's being painted there in the background as John's laying out that picture for us to see.

It continues in Chapter 3, where you see the spiritual poverty of Nicodemus, the ruler of the Jews. He needs to be born again. Leading into Chapter 4, where again water comes onto the scene in a very powerful way, where is it that Jesus in God's sovereignty stops for a drink? It's at Jacob's well, and the text emphasizes that detail with a lot of emphasis. You have first of all the fact that we're told that. He stopped at Jacob's well near Sychar, and then remember the woman that comes to Him? She's coming out to get some water. She's thirsty. He's thirsty. He says, "Give Me a drink." She says, "How is it that You, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan for a drink? He says, "Really it's not so amazing that I'm asking you for a drink. What's amazing is that you are not asking Me for a drink." What's happening there? After He tells her about living water, after He says, "I have living water," she goes on to say, "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You?" There's this contrast.

Jacob's well, which was an amazingly good well – we talked about it when we looked at that passage – was a well fed by a spring. It was a well that you could go to today and still find active 4000 years later. The well Jacob dug is still providing water. You might not want to drink it, compared to how clean our water is now, but there's a well there. She and the Samaritans looked back to Jacob as their father. Erroneously, the Jews looked to Jacob as their patriarch, and it's the water that Jacob gave contrasted with the water that Jesus gives.

Look at the water that Jesus gives. It brings eternal life. And here I think you have again another picture that's a contrast, where John's carefully laying out the details of the situation. See the five porticoes. See this huge pool near the sheep gate, near the temple, in the shadow, virtually, of the temple, where these people apparently have come for the Feast. They've come for the Feast, and they would go to the pool of Bethesda – the lame, the blind, the sick – because they believed that they could be healed there. So you had this picture in the shadow of the temple, of water there that's believed to heal, contrasted with the One who possesses Living Water, who really can heal. So we've looked at “When?” and “Where?” and now “Who?”

### 3) Who?

***John 5:3 ~ In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered,...***

He tells us there's a multitude of people there, and he uses four descriptive words. I think “sick” is the main over-arching word. Those who are powerless. Those who are helpless. The word translated “sick” here, which is used two other times in the passage to describe this man that Jesus heals in Verse 5 and Verse 7, is the same Greek word, and really means weak, weakness, powerlessness. They can do nothing for themselves.

Who are these sick? Well, they're blind. They're lame. They're withered. They're people that can't see. They're people that can't walk. Withered means literally dried up. It's interesting the word for withered is from the Greek verb meaning ‘to dry’, and the picture is someone who's withered, they're diseased, and the fluids that make a body strong have somehow departed from that part of the body – a withered hand, or a withered body. They're drained. They're dramatically dried up, withered, and weakened. There's a multitude of these people. It's really interesting that He only heals one, but there's a multitude, John tells us. He wants us to see this multitude of weakness. Here in the shadow of the temple, there is this multitude of people who've come to worship and praise God at the Feast for the

bounty of His goodness, and yet look what's wrong with this picture? Why is there this multitude of people? Do you see the impotence of the old system? It does not and cannot bring salvation. And into this picture, then, we have Jesus come.

We've looked at "When?" and "Where?" and "Who?" Now let's look at the question of "Why?" before we move on to: What does Jesus do?

#### 4) Why?

Why have these people come? They've come to be healed. I mentioned a moment ago that it seems that they would come at the seasons of Feasts, possibly every Feast, but possibly, particularly this Feast. We don't know, but they came at the Feast times and crowded around the pool of Bethesda, because they believed that they could be healed. There's an interesting textual variant. Some of you when I read the passage, you're reading along in your Bible, and I was reading some verses that you don't have. If you have the NIV or the ESV, you don't have John 5:3b or 5:4. Look carefully. It goes from 5:3 to 5:5. There is no Verse 4. The New American Standard puts it in brackets, which means it's a question: *Is this really in the originals?* The King James includes these verses, because the King James thought this was original. Well, basically, most scholars today believe that these verses weren't in the original text, because we have a number of Greek texts for the Gospel of John, and as scholars have looked at them, the earliest texts don't have these verses: 3b and 4. It just says:

***John 5:3 and 5:5 ~ In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered. A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.***

I think it's reasonable that what happened was someone who was copying made some marginal notes that got incorporated into the text, because he's further explaining, and what clearly John was getting at anyway, was that people believed you could be healed there, because this man says as much in Verse 7, doesn't he?

***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."***

How does that make sense without some explanation? Do you need someone to stand beside any pool you see and just jump in when the water gets stirred up? No, there's a reason for it. They had this belief that it would happen.

The question is: Was it true or not? Well, the text doesn't tell us, and it doesn't really matter. Let's assume it was true that the Lord for some reason chose to send an angel down at certain seasons to stir up the water and to heal one person, whoever first got down there. This would be in the period of darkness and intertestimantal period, and maybe the Lord in His grace said, "I'm going to give them some sign of My grace that continues to abide with them." Let's assume that. So if that's the case, at the Feast when thousands of people flocked to Jerusalem to worship, and you had this multitude who were also brought there – sick, lame, blind, withered, they surround the pool of Bethesda waiting for this to happen, and occasionally it does, and when it does, one person gets healed. If that's the truth, then still even at that, look at the picture.

It's like the idea of being withered and diseased, the spiritual poverty. In the shadow of the temple there is so much misery, so much need, so much abject weakness, and so much spiritual thirst to be healed. They come to the temple, and on their way to the temple they stop at the pool of Bethesda, the pool of the house of outpouring. And in the house of outpouring, they're hoping for one drop to fall on them and heal one person. Do you see the picture? Do you see what a spiritual poverty that is that they're just hoping that one person's going to be healed? And I think probably it's just superstition, that they just believe that. There's probably an underground spring feeding that, which calls for there to be a stirring up of the waters, and they just jumped in hoping.

You know, people will believe anything. I mean just look at today. As sophisticated as we are, people are still so gullible. We can all be gullible, but it's amazing how much gullibility there is in the name of God. "You mean you really believe that?" I get astonished. I was talking to someone the other day about how it amazes me that one of the anomalies about modern society is that really intelligent believe the most bazaar things. I mean how can anyone intelligent be a Mormon? But they are. I mean, they believe that God was once as we are, that we become God, and that the Father became God. They believe He used to be like you and me, and one day, if you're really a good Mormon, you'll have your own planet to populate. I mean, it's just crazy, but they believe it. Anyway, that's enough of that.

The fact is this foolishness shouldn't surprise us. It's a part of man's spiritual condition. *There but for the grace of God go we.* Only His kindness to open our eyes keeps us from doing the same thing. But the picture is look at this multitude of people needing God to intervene in their lives. They're straining after one drop of blessing, one drop of grace. It's like a drippy faucet. It's a multitude of thirsty people, and we've heard that a drip of water comes out of that faucet every now

and then. So people are waiting to see the drip, and then to dive under it and catch it with their mouths. Into this picture walks the One who possesses Living Water.

Now that brings us to the final point and the most important point, which we're going to spend some time on:

### 5) What does Jesus do?

After John paints the setting for us, he now shows us what our glorious Messiah does. He finds the man who has been there ill for 38 years, and He doesn't give him a drop, but He gives him a bath in the grace of God. There are four things that we can see that Jesus does.

a) First of all, Jesus initiates a conversation: This in itself is, if you really think about it, astonishing. Think about the poverty spiritually, the need, the great suffering that is going on, and think about who has walked into the place. Why would He have to initiate a conversation? Where's the throng of people asking *Him* to heal *them*? When you read this in context with the rest of the Gospels, well even this Gospel, we read earlier that when Jesus was in Judea the first time at the Feast of Passover, He did many signs. And so the Jews were amazed by those signs, and many believed Him, though it was a shallow faith. But they believed that He was the miracle worker of God. We read in last week's passage, Luke 4:45, that when He went back to Galilee, to Cana, the Galileans received him. Again, it was in a superficial way. Why? Because they had been at the Feast. They saw the miracles He did in Jerusalem, and so they wanted to see this miracle worker and to hear Him.

Now, after these things, He's been ministering in Galilee, and when you look back at Matthew, Mark and Luke, His ministry in Galilee was a ministry of extraordinary healing. In fact, look at the following verses. This is a summary of Jesus' early ministry in Galilee by the apostle Matthew:

***Matthew 4:23-24 ~ Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. 24 The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. 25 Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.***

So this is what is beginning to happen. His ministry is so obvious, that He walks in and no one recognizes Him. In their own misery, they fail to see the One who can help them. How often that reality is played out again, and again, and again. Those who are the most miserable, who are hurting the most, look everywhere but to the One who can save them. They sometimes go after all sorts of vain hopes that maybe this is going to satisfy, looking for that one random drip of water, when Christ is a fountain of Living Water. Now, He initiates a conversation, but praise the Lord He doesn't pass by without doing something. He initiates the conversation. That's the first thing He does.

b) Jesus asks the man a question: In Verse 6, He said, "Do you wish to get well?" The text told us He knew that the man had been a long time in that condition. He already knew all He needed to know, and I think it's always something to marvel at that Jesus asked questions at all. I mean, why does He ask questions? He has the access to the information because He is God. He doesn't need to ask questions. He can know. But sometimes He chooses to restrain His omniscience, and I think sometimes the questions might be genuine, but He could still know. Why does He ask the question? I think the bigger reason He asks the question is so that we can think about the question. If he'd just healed quickly, this man wouldn't have a chance to see his condition. He asked the question, and if you think about it, the question on the surface of it seems absurd. "Do you wish to get well?" Well, if the man didn't wish to get well, he wouldn't be at the pool of Bethesda. He wants to get well. Why does He ask this question? He knows the man's condition. He knows He's about to heal the man. It's not for Jesus' benefit. He wants the man to face the fact and to genuinely look at his condition. "Do you wish to be made whole? You are a sick man. You are weak." He wants him to see how weak he is, how impoverished he is.

The man hasn't fully tuned in to what's happening here, and so he defends himself, essentially saying, "Well, of course I want to get well. Sir, I'm not here because I want to be here." In a sense, he's saying, "I want to be healed already. I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up." He's apparently a paralytic, and when the water is stirred up, he can't get to the water quick enough. Jesus wants him to see his powerlessness. He asks the question for the benefit of this man. "Do you see how weak and powerless you are? Do you see the effects of sin? Do you see how much you need? Do you see how barren your soul is? Do you want My Living Water? Do you want healing?"

I think He also asks it so that people around notice it. "Do you wish to get well?" I can imagine people in hearing of that thinking, "What are you doing asking that

question here?" It's kind of like in the hospital if you're bleeding, and somebody said, "Do you want me to help you?" "Yes! Please! Quickly!" But He's asking the question, and He wants everyone to see the issue is this man is weak. As John has used that word 'sickness/ill', it means 'powerless'. This man is overcome by this physical ailment. He cannot help himself. He asks the question to call everyone's attention. "Look at this man. Look at his misery. Look at this man in his misery, in the midst of so much misery." He wants all to see it, and the reality is you cannot be saved until you come to see yourself in that way. You have to hear, in a sense, the Lord saying: *Do you wish to be well? Do you see your own powerlessness? Are you willing to stop striving after foolish ways of dealing with it, and acknowledge, "There's nothing I can do and that I am hopeless and helpless apart from the grace of God"?* He asks the question to help the man come to himself in that way, and he begins to start to understand, but he hasn't yet grasped it.

Now, before we move on to what Jesus says, I want us to think again about something I mentioned earlier, the third thing that Jesus does. He initiates a conversation. He asks a question, and then thirdly:

c) He chose one person: He chooses one person. It's helpful when we read the text, to let ourselves think about what's happening and ask questions of the text reverently before God. "Lord, why did You not heal the whole multitude?" He could have spoken a word, and everyone we know could have been healed. "Why did You not do that?" I think one of the reasons is to show the sovereignty of God and His grace. The Lord doesn't owe anybody His grace. Grace, in fact, by definition means it's not owed. All we're owed is wrath. That's what we deserve. You never ask God for what you deserve. Never say, "I deserve better." That's never true for any of us. We don't deserve better than what we have. We deserve far worse. So we see here the freedom of the Son of God to choose, and what we have to balance that with is our understanding that He's good and He always does what is right. But it's good for us to remember we are not God. He chooses only one for His purposes. The text may give us some hints as to why He might have chosen this man, though we don't know for sure.

***John 5:5 ~ A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.***

Think about that. For thirty-eight years, he's been going to the pool of Bethesda. He's been in misery for thirty-eight years. Many of you have not been alive that long. Many of you have not been alive half that long. Imagine thirty-eight years of this powerlessness, this weakness. Jesus picks him out because this is going to be possibly a great opportunity to show the glory of His power, and possibly as well

He picks him out because of not only the length of his disease but the cause of his disease.

I think it's reasonable in this passage to conclude that this man has a sickness that is somehow related to his own sin. You see this as you read on down in the passage, particularly in Verse 14. When Jesus finds him again later in the temple, He says to him: ***“Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.”*** One of the teachings of Scripture is that sometimes our afflictions come as chastisement. Now, not always. Certainly not always. In fact, John's going to make this really clear in John 9:3, where we read about the man who is born blind. Remember what the disciples say to Jesus? ***“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?”*** Now, Jesus doesn't say at that point, “Hey, nobody ever gets sick because of sin.” What does He say then? ***“It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*** So he wasn't born blind because of sin. He was born blind for the glory of God. Illness is often just for the glory of God. It's always for our good if we're in Christ, but sometimes it comes as chastisement. You see this also really clearly in 1 Corinthians 11, where the apostle said, “Some had become sick because of how they've approached the Lord's Table with irreverence.” There are examples in the Old Testament. This apparently seems to be the case here. This man has, in his sin, somehow brought some judgment from God. God's judgment before our death is remedial. It's designed to bring us to repentance.

Look at Hebrews 12:

***Hebrews 12:6 ~ For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines,...***

So the Lord brings things into our lives to chastise us, just like a parent spans a child in love for their good. He picks this particular man because he has this malady that's afflicted him for thirty-eight years, and because his malady is most directly related to his ultimate Spiritual need, and this is why He doesn't heal everybody, too, I think. If He healed everybody, first of all, it would create quite an uproar. There's a multitude of people. It would have been a great scene – dancing. People that couldn't walk are running around, jumping up and down. It would have been wonderful. But it would have precipitated the immediate crisis. God could have done greater miracles than He did. I mean, if you think about it, if Jesus wanted to show that He was the Son of God in a way nobody could dispute, He could have pulled the moon down and spun it on His finger, and then thrown it back in the sky. He could have done anything He wanted to do, but He chose to

reveal Himself in a way that would inspire true faith by the power of the Spirit. And He in His sovereignty, for His own glory, for His own purposes, does what He wills, and it is best. So He chooses this man who has this long history of affliction which is related to his own sinfulness, because his physical need is directly linked to his Spiritual need. The reason he's in misery is a picture of why all of us find ourselves in misery.

The reason for all misery in the world, ultimately, is sin. There would be no misery apart from sin. Sometimes our misery is complicated by other people's sin, but it's always sin that causes misery. But ultimate misery is dying and finding ourselves apart from Christ. Jesus chooses this man to illustrate His power to give life, not just to heal the physical body, but to heal the soul. He's going to heal this man not just physically, but Spiritually. That's why He chooses this man. And of course, the idea is everyone who is there should be seeing that what really matters is me getting healed Spiritually. If He healed everybody physically in that room and they lost the bigger Spiritual point, all of those multitude of people could have had was another good ten or fifteen years, and then died and gone to hell. But God is better than that. God is a lover of the soul, and so He heals and orchestrates this situation because He's seeking after true worshipers among those diseased, dying people. What we see is He initiates a conversation, He asks the man a question, He chooses one man, and then finally:

d) He unleashes the word of His power: Look at Verses 8 and 9:

***John 5:8-9 ~ 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.***

Thirty-eight years of infirmity in one second removed. "Get up." I wish it was translated this way; I think it is in the King James: "Arise..." That's what He says. "Arise, take up your pallet, and walk." The Greek verb is ἐγείρω (*egeirō*), which means to raise up. In fact, the same word is used in Verse 21 in reference to the Father. It's the exact same verb:

***John 5:21 ~ For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.***

Do you see the miracle is actually intended to demonstrate that reality? This man is a picture of weakness. He's endured thirty-eight years of misery, he's powerless, completely impotent to save himself, and is completely powerless to do anything

for his soul. And then in once instant, Jesus, who has the power to give life, says, “Rise up!”

Spurgeon’s sermon on this passage is “Impotence Meets Omnipotence”. The Son gives life. Behold the power of Jesus’ word. The veil is pulled back. Can you imagine walking with Jesus? Sometimes you would just be talking to Him and He’s a normal man, and so He says, “Give me a drink,” and there’s no veil pulled back. He’s thirsty as a man, but at moments like this when He says, “Arise, take up your pallet, and walk,” God is speaking, and the voice of God comes through, and the laws of physics are reversed, and everything that we would know medically that cannot happen is irrelevant, because God has spoken.

“Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail the incarnate Deity,” the hymn-writer has put it. The Babe in the manger. The little boy growing up in Nazareth. The carpenter in His father’s carpentry shop. The Man walking with a ragtag group of disciples. This Man who’s come to the pool of Bethesda and speaks the word, when His word comes forth, we see it’s the word of power. What the author of Hebrews says is that He upholds all things (talking about Jesus) by the word of His power. The planets are in their orbit because of the word of His power. John has told us at the beginning of his book, about the power of Jesus’ word. In John 1:1-3, he said:

***John 1:1-3 ~ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.***

He uses the title for Jesus “The Word”, and he says in Verse 3, “Nothing has come into being,” and he says it quite emphatically, three different ways. “Nothing has come into being apart from Him.” When you go back to Genesis 1 and you see the creation, you see Jesus all over Genesis 1 with the eyes of faith. How did God create? Through His Word. ***And God said, “Let there be light.”*** Ten times in Genesis 1 you have that phrase: ***And God said...*** “And God said, “Let the waters teem with creatures, fish, and all kinds of sea creatures.” “Let the air be filled with birds.” “And God said...” And then you also have this the phrase, “And God said... And it was so.” “And God said... And it was so.” “And God said... And it was so.” That is Christ speaking the world into being.

John is saying at the very beginning of his Gospel, “I want to tell you this Man is no mere man. When I say He’s the Son of God, He is God in flesh,” and he’s

beginning to lay his case. Look at Him. When He comes up against all manner of human weakness, hopelessness, look at the Word of His power. “Rise up, take up your pallet, and walk.” This is what Paul’s talking about. The power that Jesus possesses, He still speaks with that power. He still speaks to blind eyes and makes them see. He still speaks to powerless people wrapped up in sin, bound up in their own darkness, and He says, “Arise,” and you come to life. Look to Jesus. He is still the same miracle-working Christ. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:6 ~ ***For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,”*** Note the connection between creation and regeneration. Both are the work of Christ, the work of the Word of His power.

***2 Corinthians 4:6 ~ For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.***

Conversion is a miracle every bit as much amazing as creation ex nihilo. God said, “Let there be light.” There was nothing. There was darkness, and then there was light. For those of you who know Christ, there was darkness in your soul. You were bound up in sin. Today you’re walking with God. What happened? The God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in your heart. Jesus has spoken and said, “Arise, take up your pallet, and walk.”

There are a number here today who have not yet come to Christ. You’ve not yet been born again. You’re still in darkness. What is the answer? It is to look to the only One who can help you: Jesus Christ. It’s to stop looking to every other manmade solution, for drips, random drips in the desert, and to go to the One who can speak and you will become alive. Jesus Christ has done everything necessary through His atoning death, dying on the cross in our place for our sins, paying the sin debt of everyone who would ever believe, and rising from the dead to prove that He is a mighty Savior. He not only says, “Arise,” but He got up out of the grave Himself. He is the One who has all power. He is the miracle-working God, and so for the sinner, He is the hope.

What joy there is when we go to share the Gospel with someone, we look and we see, we look around us and we feel like sometimes the holiday season can be that time. You get together with family, and there are blessings and wonderful joys of that, and we need to go and be emissaries of love, but sometimes getting together with family is getting together with a reminder of how lost those we love are. We look around us and it’s like the pool of Bethesda. The reality is they’re in misery and they don’t even know it. They’re in misery and they don’t even want help. Jesus could walk in to Thanksgiving, and they wouldn’t say a thing. And you

think, “How in the world are these people going to be helped?” This passage tells us to be faithful. Trust in Christ yourself as you go. The Lord has appointed you in His sovereignty, to be at that Thanksgiving, to be in their life. You go and you look for opportunities to love people and to have the opportunity to point to Jesus in some way, to bring Him into the conversation. “God has been good to me.” You look for opportunities to lift up Christ. In the lifting up of Christ of certain moments in your words, as weak and halting and frail as they are, when He also speaks and says, “Arise,” new life comes. Light shines out of darkness. That’s the hope for evangelism. It’s not in us. It’s not in our cleverness. It’s not anything in us. It’s in the power of the Word of Christ. So let’s keep lifting up Jesus and trusting, not being discouraged by all the powerlessness and the impotence that we see around us spiritually, the misery, but realize that Jesus is the omnipotent One.

This is also true for us in our sanctification. We feel powerless to fight sin. What do you need? Keep looking to Jesus. “I can’t overcome. I can’t overcome.” Keep looking to Christ. That’s how every single temptation needs to be dealt with is that way. You need to acknowledge. So often satan tempts us and then he accuses us. You have a thought, an angry thought, a prideful thought, a lustful thought, a greedy thought. The thought comes, and then satan starts condemning you, and what happens is we think, “Oh no, here I go again. I can’t believe I’m thinking like that.” What you should do is go to Jesus. “Lord Jesus, look. Here I am. I’m struggling again. I want to lose my temper. What’s wrong with me?” Acknowledge your weakness, because He’s still there, saying, “Do you want to be well today?” And if you look to Christ in your temptation, acknowledging your absolute poverty, saying, “Here I am. I’ve walked with the Lord so many years, and yet still I’m struggling with this foolishness of anger,” if you keep looking to Christ more and more, you’re going to find He’s going to be saying, “Arise, get up and walk,” and He’s going to help you in that temptation. And then the next time you do it, you’re going to see that over a period of time, new life is growing in that area, in that dark corner of your life. Though you’re a Christian, it’s been dark for awhile, and He wants to speak light into it. That is the glory of our Savior. He said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the One who is, and who was, and who is to come, the One who possesses all power.” May we glorify Him by trusting only in His power.

Let’s pray together...

*Our Father, we thank You for the glory of Jesus Christ, the power of Jesus Christ. Lord, we pray that You would search our hearts and help us to examine where we are, each person here. Lord, for those that have not surrendered to Jesus, who have not truly been born again, open their eyes even now. Help them to call out to*

*Christ, to run to Him. Lord Jesus, thank You that You've said that You will not turn away anyone who comes to You. You quicken our hearts to desire You. You enable us to trust You. Father, help all of us to be people who love the Savior more, who acknowledge more and more our weakness and our poverty, and say with the apostle Paul, "I glory in my weaknesses, for when I am weak, then I am strong." Our strength is in our great Savior. May You be glorified. Be glorified more and more in people who know the wonder of Your sufficiency, the satisfaction of looking only to Jesus. We pray this in His Name, Amen.*

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