

Healed After 38 Years

With the beginning of John 5, we come to a new section of John's gospel, in which he portrays Jesus in direct conflict with the Jewish religious leaders. The general layout of chapters 5-10 shows us Jesus ministering in the midst of various Jewish festivals: in chapter 5, Jesus is ministering on the Sabbath; in chapter 6, the Passover Feast; in chapters 7 and 8, the Feast of Tabernacles; in chapter 10, the Feast of Hanukkah. In chapter 5 in particular, we observe a trial motif. It begins with Jesus being accused by the Jews for violating the Sabbath tradition and complicating that with indirect claims to deity; and the chapter continues with Jesus "presenting his case," through his description of his relationship with the Father in verses 19-30, continuing with his "witnesses" described in verses 31-47. The chapter begins with Jesus being prosecuted and ends with Jesus doing the prosecuting!

In today's text, we understand something about the very nature of our confrontation with Jesus, namely, that we cannot really get to know the Father without being confronted significantly by Jesus Christ in two ways: our brokenness and our sinfulness. Let's look at the text.

John 5:1-18

1 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 **13** Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.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."

Jesus Is Equal with God

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. **Jesus confronts our brokenness (vv. 1-9a)**

Notice that when Jesus goes to this Jewish festival, rather than going straight to the temple, he goes to the Pool of Bethesda, a gathering place for invalids in his own day, the blind, lame, and paralyzed. What we have here is a very picture of humanity (Cf. Romans 5:6). We are all moral and spiritual invalids who need desperately the help that Jesus can give us. Without his help we really have no answer for our infirmity, just as these invalids had no answer but their superstitious dream of being healed magically in the Pool of Bethesda. Jesus comes to heal us amidst our weaknesses and our superstitions as he demonstrates in this text by healing the man with the word, even when the man didn't answer Jesus' question directly.

II. **Jesus confronts our sinfulness (vv. 9b-18)**

All of us have sinful tendencies that impede our relationship with God; in fact, these impediments make our relationship with God impossible without God's gracious work in our hearts. Jesus has to confront three major categories of sin and rebellion in this text.

a) Our self-centeredness (vv. 9b-15)

The Bible in general teaches us that disease and afflictions are not necessarily the direct

result of a particular sin (Cf. Luke 13:1-5; John 9:3); but the Bible also teaches that some afflictions are, in fact, the result of our personal, particular sin. (Cf. Acts 5; 1 Corinthians 11:30) What is very interesting in this text is that this man seems to be afflicted with “victimitis” (thanks to Dr. Dale Bruner for this phrase). He has lived all of his life being victimized by his illness and depending upon other people, and after his healing, he doesn’t even know Jesus’ name! Notice that Jesus follows up with this newly healed man — he finds him in the temple and severely warns him of the need to “sin no more,” in order that nothing worse may happen to him. Jesus knows that he needs not only to be healed of his brokenness but of his inner sinfulness/self-centeredness.

b) Our self-righteousness (v. 16)

The Jewish leaders noticed that the newly healed man was carrying his mat, but hardly noticed at all, it seems, that he had been miraculously healed of a lifelong disease! This is the effect of legalism and moralism — we notice the wrong things. God obviously hates legalism, and this seems to be one reason that Jesus quite often heals on the Sabbath day, so that others may understand the futility of justification by conformity to religious traditions. So Jesus teaches this man and all the Pharisees that in order to have an intimate relationship with God we must cease trusting our own religious performance and trust only the grace and mercy of God in Jesus Christ. Notice that” Jesus did not simply command this man to simply rise and walk, but to “get up, *take up your bed* and walk,” (italics added) intentionally instructing the man to violate the Sabbath in order to draw attention to the vanity of religious customs in his day.

c) Our self-enthronement (vv. 17-18)

When Jesus explains his behavior on the Sabbath, he takes the Jewish leaders into much deeper waters. His explanation for his behavior on the Sabbath is that we all know that God doesn’t rest on the Sabbath (otherwise the universe would collapse), but Jesus says that he *too* is working, suggesting his equality with the Deity. His disciples may not have understood what he meant, but Jesus’ religious opponents understand completely and they accuse him of blasphemy and systematically seek to murder him. The remaining portion of chapter 5 is Jesus’ defense and countercharges to those who dismiss his lordship and his deity. In order to know God intimately, we must dethrone ourselves and enthrone the Lord Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Jesus go to the Pool of Bethesda during the Festival? What were his other options? What should we learn from his conduct?

2. What errors did the former invalid commit after Jesus healed him? What warning did Jesus give him in verse 14? How do you explain these words when you compare them to Jesus’ words in Luke 13:1-5 and John 9:3?

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3. What was wrong with the covenantal Jewish perspective on the Sabbath in Jesus' day? How did Jesus approach this problem? What are the moralisms and legalisms in our day? How should we handle these things?

 4. What is Jesus' main point in verse 17? Why did the Jews respond so vehemently? How should we be encouraged and challenged from these verses?

Going Deeper

1. In what ways do you need to shift more of your focus from humans in power to humans in need?

2. In what ways are you not treating Jesus as the exalted Son of God? What can you do to grow in your submission to his lordship?