

The Healing At The Pool Of Bethesda

John 5:1-15

The Healing at the Pool

1 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3 Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. 5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

7 “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

8 Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” 9 At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, 10 and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”

11 But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”

12 So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”

13 The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

14 Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” 15 The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

The next sign that John's Gospel writes about is the healing of a paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. As we begin, it might be appropriate to indicate the number of items in this story that we are not told in detail, like:

- vs. 1 - the specific festival that brought Jesus to Jerusalem again - Jews were obliged to visit on three major feasts, Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles
- vs. 2 - the Sheep Gate or Pool - scholars only site that when sheep were brought to the Temple for sacrifice they were placed in an area northeast of the Temple
- the use of a Semitic name rather than a Hebrew name for this pool - in this century the pool described here has been discovered and excavated with similar descriptions - currently property of the White Fathers near St. Anne's Church
- verse 4 - that is missing from this translation of most of the early witnesses that reads: [John 5:4 Some manuscripts include here, wholly or in part, "*paralyzed—and they waited for the moving of the waters. From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease they had.*"]
- vs. 5 - does not say that this man was at the pool for all thirty eight years
- vs. 6 - why Jesus picked this particular person from all the others
- vs. 7 - how, when, or why the water was stirred

This again, I believe, indicates that the author of John's Gospel is trying to make a point with this story and the details above are not primary in getting to his point. He is creating a scene to locate Jesus in Jerusalem around the Temple where Jesus would be apt to meet religious leaders of the Temple and where that contact would be probable. The pool not only gave the waiting animals a place to be watered and cared for but it was also a place

where people, who had dramatic physical needs, were waiting for a special event hoping the angel of the Lord would stir the waters. We are not told anything specific about the man that Jesus spoke to except that he was ill for quite some time. We also do not know if he was at the pool for all of his thirty eight years as an invalid or why Jesus picked him out from all the others. When asked if he would like to get well the man simply says that he has yet to find anyone who was willing to help him be first into the pool when the waters were stirred. This brief story was used by John to preface a whole chapter about Jesus and his conduct on the Sabbath so the details were not very important.

What then is the main point of this story? It was on the Sabbath that Jesus told him to "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." The man was cured, and the point of the story begins with him picking up his mat and walking. Why was this the point? The story continues by immediately telling us that the Jewish leaders say, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." The Jewish leaders who saw this happening asked the man who told him to pick up his mat and walk. There is no mention of their awareness of a miracle or that this man was not able to make his decision to move on his own. The man simply responds to their reminder of the Sabbath laws by saying, "The man who made me well said to me, Pick up your mat and walk". They evidently, according to the story, were not aware that Jesus was there or that, without the moving of the waters, this was the cause of his abilities to walk. This is why they had to ask the man, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?". Even the man, we are told, "had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there." It was only later the man who was healed found Jesus in the Temple and, after speaking with Jesus, went to tell the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus.

It would seem that this whole story in chapter of the Gospel is to bring up the subject of the Laws of the Sabbath and how Jesus, a Rabbi and a good Jew, who was well aware of Sabbath Laws, was able to function as he did on this Sabbath Day. The rest of this chapter continue with this main theme as Jesus and the Jewish leaders converse about the Sabbath laws.

The Authority of Jesus:

I - Jesus points out that his work is of God, without whom he could do nothing. His mission, in establishing the Realm of God, is to bring life and healing from God and to not honor his work is to not honor God. Jesus explains that God was his father, as he taught us that we are all children of God, who should always be doing God's work.

16 So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. 17 In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." 18 For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

19 Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. 21 For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. 22 Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, 23 that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

II - Jesus again reassures them that he is acting on behalf of God and asks them to believe him. As the "Son of Man" he claims God's authority to speak and act for God. As the human sons and daughters of God we too have been commissioned to bring God's life in us to others.

24 *“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. 25 Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. 27 And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.*

III - Jesus explains that God's Realm is amazing and brings new life and judgement. Know that I can do nothing of myself, so realize that what I saying and doing is pleasing to God and not for my pleasure.

28 *“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29 and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. 30 By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.*

Testimonies About Jesus:

IV - Others have testified on behalf of Jesus

31 *“If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. 32 There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true.*

33 *“You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. 34 Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. 35 John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.*

V - Stronger testimony comes from my actions and Scripture

36 *“I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me. 37 And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, 38 nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. 39 You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*

VI - I seek the honor of God and not glory from human beings

41 *“I do not accept glory from human beings, 42 but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. 43 I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. 44 How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?*

VII - Moses is your accuser not me

45 *“But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. 46 If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. 47 But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?”*

In the Realm of God, what is the concept and purpose of the Sabbath?

Jesus was a man who did not mense words and one who backed up what he said by his deeds. There are many stories in the Gospels about Jesus and his view of the Sabbath. In Mark's Gospel (2:27-28) we hear Jesus saying, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath". Jesus makes it clear that the sabbath was instituted to be of great benefit to God's people and was not established to come with rules that make people subserviant to the sabbath. Authority, whether secular or sacred, is only authorized for serving and not to be served. Again in Mark (10:47) we see these words of Jesus, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many". Those who wish to be a part of God's Realm and who claim to be followers of Jesus must also strive to served, not to be served, and to offer their time, talent, and treasure to share God's abundant life with others.

Sabbath is a principle of recreation (re-creation) or refreshment. There are seven days in each week in our calendars and seven days in the story of creation according to Genesis. This story tells us that God actively created new things each day for six day and then rested on the seventh day. For many centuries the basic custom of people was to work for six days and to rest by doing no work on the sabbath day. As the Christian community became established after the death of Jesus, the day of rest was changed to Sunday, the first day of the week, to commemorate the day of Jesus' resurrection. As time moved on and other religions were established, the day of rest was changed according to their traditions. It is important to notice, however, that the need for a sabbath or day of rest each week is consider important in most every tradition.

In recent times, especially in first world countries, wherein commerce and industry increased, a day set aside for rest or sabbath diminished or disappeared. In these areas of the world people work, shop, and live according to their own schedules during the week. Public services like medical care, services for protection like police and fire, utilities, and many others were considered unable to close at all. Since people are necessary to operate these facilities some people no longer have a designated day for sabbath. From the human standpoint, however, the need for a day off (sabbath) or change of pace is still necessary for health and well being. Simply put, if you 'don't come apart' you will 'come apart' in body, mind, and spirit. Because of their busy schedules, more and more people do not know what it means to have a day of rest because each person must set a day for their sabbath as they are able. Rest and relaxation is seldom found as a healthy habit for far too many people.

Our traditions have evolved so that our use of time during each every week is up to us as individuals. While our jobs tell us which of the five or six days they need us it is up to each person to make sure they set aside an available day as their sabbath. Even though our customs in this twenty-first century have changed, the times and seasons of our physical world remain the same; a year has twelve months, divided by weeks, with twenty four hours in each day. For our physical well being, however, we still need a basic structure with six days to be working with at least one day each week for sabbath refreshment. As Jesus claimed to be "lord" of the sabbath, we need to be the "lord" of our sabbath to insure that we maintain our health with appropriate rest and relaxation.

Finally, the author of John's Gospel consistantly refers to Jesus as the "son of man". I believe this is important because Jesus is clearly identified with us also as sons and daughters of humanity. As a part of humanity, Jesus is presented as a model for us in the way we speak and act as partners in the Realm of God. Jesus knew God's purpose for himself and so reminds us that it is very important for each of us to remain connected to God and our divine purpose as part of God's Realm. The following are a list of words that may help you flag important areas of life to which we need to be attentive in living as a person of God and a follower of Jesus.

[For further thoughts about these words please visit: <http://janddhealth.com/LWellPage.html>]

- Probability, possibility, and productivity
- persona, persistence, and perseverance
- survival, security, significance
- Sabbath

May the caring peace of God that goes beyond human comprehension, declare God's love for you in your heart and mind as we see it in Jesus Christ; and may the blessing of God, loving Creator, gracious Liberator, and life giving Spirit keep you steadfast now and always. Amen.