

John 5:1-9 "Get Up and Walk"

**John 5:1-9** <sup>NAU</sup> After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep *gate* a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. <sup>3</sup> In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, *waiting for the moving of the waters*; <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> 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?" <sup>7</sup> 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." <sup>8</sup> Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk." <sup>9</sup> Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and *began* to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day.

As we come to this portion of God's word we see that this incident is one which took place after our Lord got back to Galilee after His encounter with the Samaritans. We're not told how long it was, only that it was some time later. And so, in verse one where we're told that Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews, we really don't know which feast it is.

Some have speculated everything from the Passover to Pentecost. We simply don't know. And so, for our purposes here in this context, it is important that the primary focus is on what Jesus is going to do and where He does it, not necessarily what part of the Jewish calendar in which He does it.

But we see that Jesus is in Jerusalem. And since this is a feast of the Jews there would have been many Jews from all over Israel there for the celebration of this feast. But as we move to verse two we see that John is going to narrow down the area in which Jesus will be ministering.

JOH 5:2 "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."

This particular area that John refers to here is actually describing a portion of the wall that surrounded ancient Jerusalem. The sheep gate is located on the eastern most entrance into the north side of Jerusalem. In fact, you might remember that the sheep gate was the first gate that was repaired when Nehemiah went back to rebuild Jerusalem in 445 B.C.

Israel had been taken into captivity because of their rebellion against the Lord. Jerusalem had been destroyed and at this time in their history many of them were under the rule of Artaxerxes. It was this king who allowed Nehemiah, who was his cupbearer, to begin rebuilding Jerusalem after Nehemiah approached King Artaxerxes.

NEH 2:1-5 "In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before; 2 so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart." I was very much afraid, 3 but I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" 4 The king said to me, "What is it you want?" Then I prayed to the God of heaven, 5 and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it."

And we know that the King agreed to allow Nehemiah to do this. When he got to the city the sheep gate was first on their list.

NEH 3:1 "***Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate.*** They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel."

As they went around the city rebuilding the different entrances they ended back at the sheep gate where they started.

By the way, the sheep gate received its name because this is where the animals for sacrifice would enter the city before going to the temple. And since most of these animals would be sheep the name was identified with them.

And so, what we find here is that Jesus probably traveled through this sheep gate to get to the pool of Bethesda. And in a sense this is

prophetic since Jesus is the great Shepherd of the sheep. He is in essence going to the sheep of Jerusalem as their Shepherd so as to draw them to Himself as well as identifying Himself as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And yet, what we are going to see here is that, (as John points out in the beginning of this gospel), those for whom Christ came did not recognize Him as their Shepherd, or Messiah.

However, despite the fact that they did not recognize Jesus as their Shepherd, our Lord was going to take the initiative in reaching out to one particular lost sheep of Israel.

JOH 5:2-4 "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, [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." (NASB)]

The pool mentioned in verse 2 is named Bethesda which means "house of mercy" or "flowing water." And it is here where Jesus is going to demonstrate His mercy and love as He extends the water of life to these people, as He did with the Samaritan woman at the well in chapter four.

Now it's here where there seems to be some confusion as to what the text says next. If you're reading from the NIV you'll notice that your bible goes from verse 3 to verse 5, omitting verse 4.

And the reason for this is because some of the earliest manuscripts omit this section which deals with angels stirring up the waters to miraculously heal people. They contend that it was an editor's note which was added to help explain why these infirmed people considered this particular pool so important.

The textual variants lean to excluding this section from verses 3b to verse 4.

But whether we include it or omit it, it doesn't change the force of this passage which has to do with sick people congregating in one location that is identified with the sheep of Israel who are about to be approached by the great shepherd of the sheep, Jesus Christ.

JOH 5:3 "Here a great number of disabled people used to lie - the blind, the lame, the paralyzed."

There was little hope for these people to get well as they congregated in great numbers around this pool which was ironically referred to as Bethesda, the house of mercy. And by the way, this is no coincidence that John points out who these people were in verse five: the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.

What a perfect picture of Israel at this time. This is descriptive of the condition of an entire nation. They were blinded to the truth that Jesus was their Messiah. They were blinded to the things of God as revealed in His word because they chose the darkness rather than the light.

PRO 4:19 "But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble."

They were lame in that they were not walking with God in truth. They were unable to walk since they were spiritually lame as well as spiritually paralyzed as they submitted to the dominion of the evil one which John speaks of in his first epistle.

1JO 5:19 "We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one."

Now, John does not mean to suggest that the evil one, who is Satan, is controlling people so that they can't make their own choices, like some marionette on a string. But to the degree that they have submitted to the ways of this world, they have voluntarily placed themselves under such control, as they choose to be friends with the evil one.

John points this out in the same letter.

1JO 2:15-17 "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."

The condition of Israel when Jesus comes on to the scene is one which is acute and chronic as it pertains to their spiritual condition. And as we continue in our text we are going to see that Jesus is the only solution to their condition of spiritual blindness, lameness and paralysis.

But it will show itself in the power of Christ who can cure physical blindness, lameness and paralysis.

JOH 5:5-6 "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?"

It's interesting that John gives us such detail of this man's plight. One of the first things we're told about him is that he had been in his sickness for thirty eight years. We don't know how old this man was, but if he had been born this way he's been an invalid for all of his life.

If he had become an invalid later in years then he's older than 38 and is probably an old man whose existence has been relegated to begging for food and money with no chance of doing anything else.

But there's something else interesting about this detail of 38 years which suggests that God has intentionally used this incident to teach us a spiritual truth about Israel at this time.

Remember, we just said that the people at this pool are identified as those who were blind, lame and paralyzed. And we made a spiritual connection to them and Israel, who was spiritually blind, lame and paralyzed.

Well, it appears that it is this verse which allows us to make this spiritual connection. Thirty eight years is no coincidental number here. John knew the connection which is why he undoubtedly brings it up as the Spirit of God brought this to mind.

To understand this we need to go back into the history of Israel. In fact, we have to go back to the place where Israel received the law from God. We know that it was at Mount Horeb, which is also called the mountain of God, where the Lord delivered the law to Israel.

It was almost two years after they received this law that they were told to leave that area of Mount Horeb.

DEU 1:6-8 "The LORD our God said to us at Horeb, "You have stayed long enough at this mountain. 7 Break camp and advance into the hill country of the Amorites; go to all the neighboring peoples in the Arabah, in the mountains, in the western foothills, in the Negev and along the coast, to the land of the Canaanites and to

Lebanon, as far as the great river, the Euphrates. 8 See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land that the LORD swore he would give to your fathers - to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - and to their descendants after them."

God meant for Israel to enter into the Promised Land just short of two years of being at the mountain of God. It would have been a relative short march into the Promised Land from Horeb. But Israel balked because of unbelief. They thought they couldn't defeat the inhabitants of the land.

And so the Lord punished Israel by making them wander in the desert. He told them that that generation who came out of Egypt would not cross over into the Promised Land because of their unbelief in the God who delivers. Guess how many years they wandered after the time and place where they received the law at Mount Horeb.

Thirty eight years.

DEU 2:14 "Thirty-eight years passed from the time we left Kadesh Barnea until we crossed the Zered Valley. By then, that entire generation of fighting men had perished from the camp, as the LORD had sworn to them."

We usually think of Israel wandering the desert for 40 years, but the truth of the matter is that only 38 of those 40 were the direct result of their not crossing over into the promised land when God told them to go. They saw the land. They sent out spies. But they were unwilling to obey God and trust that He could bring them in.

For 38 years they suffered God's punishment because of their rebellion and sin. And this Jew at the pool near the sheep gate is one who has suffered his lameness for 38 years. What God has done here is to give us a picture in this man of the spiritual condition of Israel, and the world for that matter.

But we know from God's word that at the end of the thirty eight years God would bring Israel into the Promised Land. And here we have Jesus who is the Promised Land, the promised Messiah, coming to Israel, and in this case to a man who has been lame for 38 years to deliver both him and the world.

The great Shepherd of the sheep comes through the sheep gate to bring them into the promise He gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after their rebellion. But notice what Jesus says to this one lost sheep.

JOH 5:6 "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?"

Now the NIV says that Jesus "learned that he had been in this condition for a long time." A better translation would be that Jesus "knew that he had already been a long time *in that condition...*" (NAU)

One has Jesus seeking information, the other tells us that He already knew, being all knowing. One thing this tells us is that Jesus didn't simply stumble across this man. He had known this man before the creation of the world as He did with the woman at the well. And now He was coming to seek him out and deliver him from both his physical ailment and his sin.

This, by the way, is exactly what Jesus has done with you and me. If we are in Christ by faith it is because our Lord had personally sought us out and came to us and opened our eyes to the truth of who He is; Savior and God.

Like this lame man we were all spiritually lame and blind. We were dead in our trespasses and sins and yet in His love He came looking for us when we weren't looking for Him. Praise God!

But back to this man. Jesus asks him a very interesting question. "Do you want to get well?"

Now, we might be tempted to ask why in the world did Jesus ask him this? Who in his right mind would not want to get well when they've been afflicted like this for 38 years? But there's a reason for this question from our Lord.

The first thing we need to notice is that Jesus is not asking if this man has the desire to get well. That's a given. What Jesus is asking this man, whether he realizes it at this point or not is, 'do you want *Me* to make you well?'

In other words this is a faith question. It is a question which is designed to force this man to place his faith in the one who can heal him. And though this man is physically lame we know he is also spiritually blind just from his response.

JOH 5:7 "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."

Now at first glance we might feel sorry for this man who obviously has some serious problems; so serious that he can't even make the short trip into the waters after they've been stirred. And this is what he's trying to convey to Jesus.

In other words, instead of looking to the one right in front of him who can heal him, he's looking to other means than our Lord.

Jesus is saying to this man, quit depending on yourself to obtain your deliverance because your deliverance is right in front of you if you would have eyes to see. And so often we do the same thing. It's not as though we don't trust that God will be there for us but we often depend on our own ability to get us through a trial as we say we're taking God with us in the situation.

This doesn't mean we are not to be engaged in the process. If we've lost a job we don't simply say God will meet the need while we sit at home watching Oprah. But it does mean that when we've done all we can do then there has to be a point where we have to trust that God will do the rest.

And often times, like this man at the pool, God is asking us if we want to be delivered. And by that He means do you want to stop trusting in your own ability now and let Me take care of it in My way?

But here's the beauty of God's grace. Often times we're our own worst enemy when it comes to doing God's will. And sometimes God will just push us out of our way and take care of it Himself because He loves us and doesn't want us fouling it up any longer. That's what He does with this man in our text.

JOH 5:7-9 "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...."

For years this man has not been able to get into the water. And Jesus knows he's not going to get into it any time in the near future. Instead of trying to reason with this guy or even volunteer to take him into the water He simply cuts to the chase and heals the man.



This man obviously didn't know Jesus was the Messiah or that He had the ability to heal him. And yet Jesus doesn't care about that. He wants to meet this man's need and He does.

How much like this man we were outside of Christ. We were going off in our own direction and our Lord says, you don't want to continue on that path because it leads to destruction, and He cuts us off at the pass and brings us to Himself as He brings us to our senses after opening up our eyes to the truth.

By the way, you'll notice at this point that this man doesn't exercise any faith at all. His faith had nothing to do with him being physically healed. Now this doesn't mean that if we're seeking healing that we shouldn't exercise faith in God. But the point is that despite our lack of faith God is not limited by our faith as some people in the Christian community would suggest.

This man figured he would be lame the rest of his life. The next thing he knows Jesus gives him a command. "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." Now someone might suggest that his healing didn't come until he made the attempt to get up and walk.

This simply isn't the case as the text makes clear.

**John 5:9** <sup>9</sup> *Immediately the man became well*, and picked up his pallet and *began* to walk.

There is no connection to faith here, only that the man was made well immediately at the command from Jesus to "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."

The command to get up might have made a difference if Jesus had revealed Himself to this man as the Messiah, and then waited for the man to make a move to get up, but as far as this guy was concerned Jesus was just another Jew in town to celebrate the feast.

There was no reason to obey an apparent crazy command from a stranger and get up since you knew you couldn't. But what if you were immediately given the ability to get up and you now knew you had the ability? You would do what you had the capacity to do. This man's legs were immediately strengthened and so when the command from Jesus came he obeyed because the miracle had already taken place.

God never asks us to do anything unless He first gives us the ability to do it, or promises the means to do it. But as wonderful as

this physical healing was in this man's life it pales in comparison to the miracle of eternal life this man will receive from Christ as his sins will be forgiven.

In fact, our Lord Jesus uses a similar situation to teach that He can do both; heal physically and forgive sin.

MAT 9:1-8 "Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. 2 Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." 3 At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!" 4 Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? 5 *Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?* 6 *But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins....*" Then he said to the paralytic, *"Get up, take your mat and go home."* 7 *And the man got up and went home.* 8 When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men."

You would think that everyone who experienced such a miracle would do as the crowds did here in Matthew 9, and that is to praise God. But as we'll see next week some people just can't get past the rules and regulations they place on themselves and see the plain handiwork of God who gave those rules and has now come to fulfill them in Christ.

Don't ever forget that despite ourselves sometimes God will come to our rescue even during times when we're not actively seeking Him. That's not an excuse not to seek Him. We should always desire to seek our Lord as we look to Him, love Him and obey Him. But there are times when we can't even pray because we don't have the words. But even then our Lord comes to our aid.

ROM 8:26-27 "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

Our Lord knows our weaknesses and will meet us where we are, but He is always encouraging us and providing the means to grow stronger. He doesn't want us weak. And we grow stronger as we

use the means He provides for our strength; the word of God, fellowship of the saints, and prayer.

He's always there for us. And now He simply says get up and walk and go out into this world declaring that I am the One who gives life eternal to all who would repent and believe on Me.