

The Third Sign: The Healing at the Pool
John 5:1-15

5:1-7

John tells his readers that Jesus was on his way back to Jerusalem for a Jewish feast but he does not mention its name. This probably means that there is no connection between the feast and the miracle that Jesus performed as is the case at other points in the narrative. Later, John is very careful to say that the feeding of the five thousand (6:1-15) took place during Passover because there is a close relationship between the sign and the feast.

He gives very specific details about the location to indicate that he is retelling an actual event, not a fable. The actuality of these miracles is important. What they reveal about Jesus requires the reader to believe that the event really happened.

NOTE: In recent translations verse 3b and 4 are left out because they are not considered to be part of the original text. Copyists may have added the details about angels in order to explain why the sick gathered there on a regular basis.

We are told very few details about the invalid except that he had been in his present condition for thirty eight years unlike the official's son whose illness had overtaken him only recently. Jesus may have asked someone about the lame man because we are told in that Jesus "**learned**" that he had been in this condition for a long time." (6) Another possibility is that some other person, because they knew of the Jesus' healing powers, decided to tell Jesus about him in the hope that he would show compassion. Interestingly, Jesus had knowledge of the marital situation of the Samaritan woman by inexplicable means. She was surprised by what he knew of her so she called him a prophet. (4:19) The meaning and importance of this miracle does not

rest upon our knowing the source of Jesus' knowledge of the man he healed. He may have used natural or supernatural means.

The text tells us that many sick people were there. Jesus noticed the one man particularly but John does not tell us why. As in the first two signs, Jesus takes the initiative to ask something rather unexpected that may be intended to raise a question in the reader's mind concerning the true nature of their own faith. **"Do you want to get well,"** he asked. The man was sitting in a place where he could be healed (according to popular superstition) so is it not self evident that he did?

Why the question? After so many years of waiting by the pool the man may have gotten use to living off his disability so Jesus decided to give him the opportunity to declare that he really did want to be healed. Also the paralytic needed to be prepared for the fact that his life was going to be radically changed in more ways than one so Jesus is leading him to see that his physical healing was only a first step. Eventually the lame man was asked to commit himself to a fuller obedience that involved a reshaping of his inner life as well. (14) The lame man's physical healing must be followed by a more profound and important healing that will set his entire life in a new direction. In a very subtle way, Jesus is warning the lame man that the healing he is going to receive is much broader and deeper the physical healing; it will also involve the repenting of his sin and an obedience to God. (14)

John MacArthur, a popular American preacher, evangelist, and Bible commentator wrote a book recently called "The Gospel According to Jesus." One of the issues he takes up in the book is what he refers to as the "easy believism" of many evangelical preachers. He mentions the common phrase that is used for conversion when people are asked to "accept Jesus in their hearts." His criticism is that evangelicals do not include in their evangelical message what Jesus actually taught about what it means to be a true disciple. Jesus must be presented, he argues, as Lord as well as Saviour. When people

first come to faith they need to be made aware that conversion involves a radical reorientation of their thinking, aspirations, and behaviour. Every aspect of life ought to be informed by Jesus' teaching and animated by his effectual presence by the work of the Holy Spirit. MacArthur means that there is no "justification" without "sanctification." The first without the second is nothing more than "cheap grace."

In verse 7 the paralytic situation is made all the more desperate; he has been lame so long that he is unable to move at all so getting into the pool is impossible without help from someone. Evidently Jesus accepted his response as a "yes" to the question he had previously asked.

Just as the first two signs involved a situation or problem that only Jesus could answer, so this long standing need is beyond the reach of anyone except God in Christ.

It is difficult to resist the notion that John is directing our attention to a problem far more profound than this first century man's paralysis. Could it be that he is pointing out that the paralytic stands for every man and every woman? If so, then John is telling us that there is a human condition in each of us that is so serious that only Jesus can cure it. The essential requirement is that those who require healing must recognize their true condition and they must want to be healed. The Gospel alone gives this knowledge because we have no natural or subjective knowledge of our true situation before God apart from the "light that lightens every man's heart."

This incident happened two-thousand years ago but it is made contemporary when men and women see that they are like the paralyzed man in that they are unable to be what God intends and desires apart from the forgiving and empowering love of Christ.

4:8-9a

Jesus commands the man to get up, pick up his mat, and walk. Up until now there has been no indication that faith is present in the paralytic. However, the command alone enabled him to walk for the first time in thirty eight years because Jesus' words created the faith required to overcome his paralysis. The paralytic's faith was not the result of his own unaided will. When God in Christ commanded him he was given the faith that made response possible because "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God."

There is an important theological truth here. The requirement of faith is not a precondition for us to believe the Gospel. It is the fruit that the Gospel produces.

4:9b-10

Those who are the most "religious" are unable to celebrate or find good in this remarkable event and they have little interest in the one who healed the man. Their only concern is that the Sabbath law had been broken. (or so they thought) These religionists had not been witnesses to the miracle but the simple fact that the healed person carried a mat was a serious bone of contention.

The original commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) had been understood as relating only to a person's daily work so carrying a bed would not be seen as a transgression of the Mosaic law unless the man was a furniture mover. Carrying any object was forbidden unless it was an act of compassion.

Over the centuries an oral tradition developed and this tradition was greatly cherished by the Pharisees because they wanted to resist compromise with other pagan cultures. (a justifiable concern) The oral tradition identified thirty nine categories of work that was forbidden on the Sabbath because this law was seen as the most important of all.

Jesus' problem with the Pharisees in the Gospels was that the law had become an end in itself. What was intended as a means for Israel to demonstrate their covenantal relationship with God had become an end in itself. Outward conformity to law had replaced a true heart commitment and this resulted in self righteousness and a pattern of behaviour directed towards the letter of the law but not the spirit. Their legalism could not save and it was an enemy of the Gospel because it blinded them from seeing the true significance of the man's healing.

Finally, Jesus is not saying that Sabbath rest for the purpose of restoration is unimportant and he is doing more than simply correcting a tradition. When he healed the paralytic on the Sabbath he knew that he was the sign that God's kingdom was breaking in and providing **the** rest that the Sabbath law anticipated. What the religionists failed to see was that Jesus is **the restoration for** which Sabbath keeping was the preparation.

4:11-13

If the reader assumes that the paralyzed man new about the rules he had broken it is clear that Jesus' command was enough justification for him to pick up the mat. He required nothing more than this.

The Pharisees continued their query by asking who the man was that gave the instructions to "break the Sabbath law." His response is a surprising one; "he had no idea" because Jesus had slipped away to escape the controversy that he knew would result. At this point, his faith consisted in an active obedient response to the command of a person whose words required no external authority. The man was unable to offer a theological argument that

could account for what had happened to him but it was enough to respond according to the understanding he had at the moment.

There is an important truth here; every believer has the responsibility to mature in his/her understanding of what the New Testament teaches about Jesus. However, the work that Christ does is not limited by our understanding of him. Jesus is more than we know and more than we deserve!

1:14-15

This miracle ends with a scene that reminds the reader of Jesus' encounter with the woman taken in adultery in chapter 8. (8:11b) This man, like the Samaritan woman, is told to stop his sinning in order to escape very dire consequences that will be worse than his paralysis. This warning is most likely a reference to the final judgment.

The reader cannot tell from the text whether or not Jesus was deliberately looking for him when he went to the temple. However, the words that Jesus spoke were so important that it is reasonable to assume that his encounter with the one he had healed was not accidental.

It is difficult to assess the amount of gratitude in the man's heart. The fact that he told the Jews about his miraculous healing suggests that he had at least enough thankfulness to overcome a fear of criticism from his fellow Jews because he must have realized, from his previous encounter, (5:10) that he was now at the center of a religious controversy but he probably did not realize the firestorm that was to come. (5:16-18)

It is not clear from John's account the extent to which the healed man understood that the healing of his physical affliction was intended to lead to a more Godly life. Did he really understand the intention of Jesus' warning? We cannot tell but one thing is clear! God's gifts are given to the unworthy.

He had done nothing to earn his cure. It was done because God is gracious and his gifts are for sinners, not saints.

John does tell us that he was willing to give credit to the one who had healed him. Even if his understanding of Jesus was severely limited, he was at least willing to point to the one who had bestowed such life changing mercy on him. This is all anyone can do!

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