
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read John 5.1-18. These two parallel pools are thought to be near the present day St. Anne's Church, near the temple mount in Jerusalem. Back in Jesus' day, there were colonnades [covered open air porches with the roofs supported by pillars] all around the pools and also one between them. Jesus was in Jerusalem for one of the feasts; John did not specify which feast, so it is not important other than being the reason Jesus was there. Some translations [NASB, NKJ] have part of v.3 and all of v.4 which do not appear in the earliest Greek manuscripts. Probably they were a scribe's margin notes, which another scribe errantly included in the text at some point. It does seem apparent that the man thought something similar to what those translations include, that the first to get to the waters after they were disturbed would be healed [v.7]. We do not know exactly what was wrong with the man Jesus helped, but obviously it limited his movement [v.7]. The man did not ask for help, which leads us to wonder why Jesus picked this particular man to help. Perhaps it was because one of the signs of the Messianic kingdom is that "the lame will leap like a deer" [Isaiah 35.6; NASB].

It is important to note that Jesus did pick the man, and the man did not have to show faith to receive his healing: he did not even know who it was that healed him [v.13]! Jesus is not limited by our limitations. Jesus also did not impose any faith-proving actions on the man, except that he had to obey in faith the command to get up, pick up his mat, and walk. Jesus did ask the man if he wanted to get better, but we cannot take that to mean that we have to want a blessing to receive it, since the man misunderstood Jesus' question and instead answered why he thought he had not yet been healed by the waters. It is noteworthy that years of dedication to a religious superstition had done nothing for him. Jesus healed this man simply by speaking, like the way God created the universe. The perfect tense of the Greek verb Jesus used in v.14 implies the cure was permanent. We also see that it was thorough, since the man walked away well enough to carry his mat, without signs of weakness; and the cure was immediate [v.9].

Reflect: You might have heard that you have to have enough faith, be good enough, desire the cure enough, or some other prerequisite before you can receive deliverance from your suffering. But here we see that Jesus can provide deliverance regardless of whether any of these things are true in the person he is blessing. If you need healing or help, cry out to Jesus, because it all depends on his power and the will of God the Father, not on us. If Jesus does not deliver you *out of* your problem, he certainly will deliver you *through* it, resulting in stronger and proven faith [1 Peter 1.7].

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read John 5.1-18 again. John sometimes identifies the Jewish religious leaders by a term some translate merely as "the Jews" [NASB; ESV]. He is not referring to all Jews in these instances [he was one himself!], but to the religious leaders of Jesus' day. Notice that the religious leaders were more interested in broken rules than they were in the miracle of the healing [vv.12, 16]! The healed man had not broken, by working, the Mosaic Law regarding the Sabbath. What he had broken, by carrying his mat, were the rules made by the religious leaders as part of their customs and interpretation of the Mosaic Law. The religious leaders intended these rules to protect the sanctity of the Sabbath, to not let it become just another work day. God provided some guidance as far back as Jeremiah 17.21-22 [before the Judean exile] and Nehemiah 13.15 [after the Judean return from exile], but the Pharisees had developed a system of rules so complex and with such absurd distinctions and exceptions, that the whole point was obscured. Jesus never broke God's Law either, but he would routinely ignore the customs of the Pharisees, which about this time began an ongoing and growing argument with them about the Sabbath [hinted at in v.16], which is detailed in the other gospel accounts.

Reflect: In our households and in our churches we establish standards of conduct to help everyone know how to behave acceptably. We need to be careful that these standards do not become more important than the people we are trying to help, and do not become so burdensome that they take people away from understanding God's grace instead of toward it. Think about the code of conduct in your house and your church and ask whether any rules have become disproportionately important or skewed in interpretation. What, if any, is the distinction between an expectation to not be disruptive during the worship service and an expectation to dress nicely for church? God's revelation says it is sin to have extra-marital sex, so should we teach people about this revelation? what about telling people they should never be alone with someone of the opposite gender? In the latter case, would this be useful as a helpful suggestion but not as a command or expectation? Consider the difference between God's commands and our efforts to promote such commands.

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read John 5.14. Some time later, Jesus found the same man in the Temple complex. Perhaps the man had gone to offer thanks to God for his healing or maybe he just wanted to go places he could not go before. As we noted earlier, Jesus' words implied that the man's healing was permanent, but Jesus also implied that the man's infirmity of thirty-eight years had been caused by his own sin [v.14]! We know not all illness is caused by our own sin [John 9.1-3], but apparently some illness is [1 Corinthians 11.27-33].

Reflect: Can you identify sin for which you have been unrepentant? or sin you continue to willfully do? Do you think your sin could cause you physical ailments? What about emotional ailments? You might read Psalm 39.11; Hebrews 3.13; John 8.34 for some effects of sin in believers. If we are willfully sinning or unrepentant about past sin, do we really want what Jesus has to offer?

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read John 5.15-18. We believe the events in this passage happened shortly before the time when Jesus commissioned the twelve apostles to be his special deputies and then delivered the Sermon on the Mount. This is all happening during a time when Jesus was proving who he was through his teachings, his miracles, and his interactions with people. It is a time of much disturbance, with people marveling at the words and actions of Jesus, but most failing to fully believe in Jesus as the Messiah or to be willing to change their ways to follow his example. There is also increasing hostility by the religious leaders, which further influenced doubt in the people. Not too far off, Jesus will recognize that the nation has rejected him as Messiah, and he in turn will pronounce judgment on them. John excludes most of that material, but you will find it Matthew 11-14.

John hints that Jesus was doing many things on the Sabbath [v.16], some of which are described in the other gospel accounts. Jesus offered different reasons for his actions at different times, but on this occasion Jesus stunned his critics by saying he was allowed to do what they considered "work" [healing people] on the Sabbath, because God was working too. In saying this, Jesus referred to God as "my Father," which was atypical usage in that it was so familiar. Jews in that day might refer to God as "our Father" in a formal way during prayer, but would not hint at an intimate relationship with God, like Jesus did. Jesus also said that what applied to God about the Sabbath applied to him also [v.17], which the religious leaders took to mean he was equating himself with God [v.18], thus adding the charge of blasphemy to their charge about breaking the Sabbath rules. This entrenched their hostility toward him.

Reflect: We now understand that the Triune Godhead is God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit, each distinct, yet all in such unity and of the same essence as to be one God. The Jewish religious leaders did not realize that the Messiah would have to be divine and human to fulfill all the promises God had made through the prophets. Even if they had realized it, they did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. It is a sad observation of this tale that instead of inspiring faith in them, Jesus' miracles hardened their hearts against him. When someone who is deathly ill or severely hurt miraculously heals, when circumstances inexplicably work out to bless someone in a way unimaginable before, do you react with joy at the mercies of God or with skepticism?

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read John 5.1-18. God had instructed the Jews through Moses that they were to take a Sabbath day of rest, because God had rested on the seventh day of creation [Exodus 20.8-11]. Whether we are mandated to have a Sabbath day in this New Covenant era is unclear [it is the only one of the Ten Commandments not repeated in the New Testament teaching for Christians], but most Christians believe in taking a day of rest to honor God [especially by worshipping together in church] and to refresh themselves before starting a new week. A little noticed aspect of the argument in John 5.17 is that Jesus showed that rest is not necessarily the same as idleness. We know God rested after creation [Genesis 2.2], but now we hear from Jesus that God is never idle!

Reflect: If rest is not idleness, what implications are there for the way you approach your day of rest? Are there things you have refused to do that you now believe you should? Are there things you have wished to do that you now believe you may? What sort of activities would make the day holy to God? Are there any, other than work, that would detract from that specialness for God? Will you change your approach to a Sabbath [or rest] day now?