

**The Gospel of John (30);  
The Third Sign; the Healing of the Lame Man on the Sabbath**

**Introduction:**

Let us turn to John 5 in which we read of yet another journey that Jesus made from Galilee to Jerusalem. Here we see that opposition to the Lord Jesus increased in Jerusalem when conflict surfaced after He graciously healed a lame man. It is in the first portion of this chapter that we read the account of Jesus healing this man who had been invalid for 38 years. What precipitated the hostility of the Jewish leaders, is that Jesus did this and gave instruction to the man on the Sabbath Day.

This story is not found in the other three Gospels. But this is not unusual, for John's Gospel contains a number of episodes that have no parallel in the other Gospels.<sup>1</sup> We had indicated when we first began our study of this Gospel that John included many accounts that are not found in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. An early church writer had declared that this was John's original intention in writing this Gospel, that he desired to inform his readers of events in our Lord's life that had not been recorded elsewhere. Eusebius of Caesarea (260/265–339/340) wrote the first church history in the fourth century AD. In his history Eusebius cited Clement of Alexandria (150-215) who wrote of this Gospel:

“But that John, last of all, conscious that the outward facts had been set forth in the Gospels, was urged on by his disciples, and, divinely moved by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel.”<sup>2</sup>

What is commonly understood by these words is that John wrote His Gospel purposely to include details that are not found in the Synoptic Gospels, with the desire to set forth spiritual truth.

Let us read the first 15 verses of this chapter in John's Gospel.

<sup>1</sup>After this 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 porches. <sup>3</sup>In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. <sup>4</sup>For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. <sup>5</sup>Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup>When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, “Do you want to be made 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, “Rise, take up your bed and walk.” <sup>9</sup>And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.

And that day was the Sabbath. <sup>10</sup>The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, “It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed.”

<sup>11</sup>He answered them, “He who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your bed and walk.’ ”

<sup>12</sup>Then they asked him, “Who is the Man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’” <sup>13</sup>But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that

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<sup>1</sup> The only episode that all four Gospels have in common, other than Jesus' Passion narrative, is the feeding of the 5,000, which we will encounter at the beginning of chapter 6.

<sup>2</sup> Donald A. Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), pp. 27f.

place. <sup>14</sup>Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, “See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.”

<sup>15</sup>The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

## I. A few considerations of the text itself

The English translation of this account that we read is from the New King James Version (NKJV) of the Bible. If you read along using the English Standard Version (ESV) or the New International Version (NIV), you probably noticed a few significant differences, not just in wording, but in content. We should address the reasons for these variations before we consider the account itself.

We might first say a word about the translation of **verse 2**. Here are the translations of the three versions mentioned above:

The NKJV reads, “Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called *in Hebrew*, Bethesda, having five porches.”

The ESV reads, “Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, *in Aramaic* called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades.”

The NIV reads, “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.”

We see that the NKJV recorded the name of the pool, “Bethesda”, to have been a *Hebrew* name. The ESV and the NIV state that “Bethesda” was an *Aramaic* word. The problem here is not with two different readings between Greek manuscripts, for the Greek text reads *Hebraisti* (Ἑβραϊστὶ), which should be translated “Hebrew.” Why did these two more modern English translations use the word, “Aramaic”? It is because Aramaic was the language of the common people in Judea and Galilee since the return of Jewish exiles from the Babylonian exile in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Both Hebrew and Aramaic had the same alphabet, but were different languages. Aramaic was the language of the Babylonians, which the Jews had adopted as their language while in exile. But the Greek word in verse 2 indicates that the name of this pool was in Hebrew, not Aramaic. In my opinion the ESV and the NIV should not have read “Aramaic” when the Greek text says “Hebrew.” In this detail, the NKJV is the correct English translation.

In **John 5:3**, there is a phrase in the NKJV which is not included in the ESV and the NIV. That phrase in the NKJV is at the end of the sentence. The sentence reads, “In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, *waiting for the moving of the water*.” This clause was not original with John’s Gospel and should not be included. It is not in the ESV or the NIV. Those translators were right in not including it.

Another more significant difference between the NKJV (and the KJV) and all of the newer English translations is **John 5:4**. It provides an explanation why this invalid man was at this pool of Bethesda. It sets the explanation forward as fact. It reads,

For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.

If you were following our reading of the NKJV in your ESV or NIV, when I read verse 4, you found that there was no verse 4 in your translation. The ESV and the NIV pass from verse 3 to verse 5, leaving off verse 4. Why did they do this? The reason is that verse 4 in the NKJV is only found in much later Greek manuscripts. The earlier Greek manuscripts of John’s Gospel did not include verse 4.

The NKJV (& KJV) translation is based on many more manuscripts than the newer English translations which are based on much older, but far fewer Greek manuscripts. Prior to the invention of the printing press with movable type (a. AD 1439), manuscripts of the Holy Scriptures were hand copied by scribes. The nature of that work resulted in no two New Testament manuscripts copied by scribes being identical with one another. When the King James Version was published in 1611, the Greek New Testament on which it was based was the product of consulting few and later Greek manuscripts. Today there are almost 6,000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament available for study. Some of these date much earlier in the Christian era than what the translators of the KJV had available to them. Many textual scholars believe that the verse 4 was a later addition to the textual tradition, included by a scribe in the copy of his Greek text of John's Gospel.

And so, when we read this account of the healing of this man in the KJV and the NKJV, we might be struck with the strangeness of verse 4. It seems to legitimize a superstitious manner of receiving healing through the intervention of an angel. The easiest way to deal with this difficulty is to understand that it was not original with John, but was added later in a scribal copy. However, it does probably reflect a popular belief, though untrue, about the healing qualities of the water. Here is a good statement about this matter:

An early expansion of the text, first appearing in the Western and Caesarean recensions, completes verse 3 with the participle phrase, 'waiting for the movement of the water', and then continues: 'For an angel (of the Lord) went down into the pool at a certain time and disturbed the water. So the person who stepped in first after the disturbing of the water was made well, whatever his disability has been' (cf. KJV, verse 4). While we cannot credit (or discredit) the Evangelist himself with this information about the angel, it probably reproduced the popular belief about the cause of the healing properties ascribed to the water. That the water was indeed disturbed from time to time, and that it was deemed advantageous to get into the pool on these occasions, may be gathered from verse 7.<sup>3</sup>

It is very possible that in addition to the conduit that fed the pool, there was also a spring feeding the pool that would on occasion cause a disturbance of the water. Superstition generated the rest of the story.

Now let us look at the meaning of the text itself.

## II. The details of the passage (John 5:1-12)

We have showed in earlier portions of this Gospel that individual episodes, like the one before us, follow a common, discernable, four-stage literary pattern. Before us we read of the following:

1. The *introduction/setting* of the pericope (5:1-5)
2. The *conflict* (5:6-10), which here involves not only the man's need of healing, but also that it took place on the Sabbath Day.
3. The *resolution* (5:11-14) in which the difficulty is removed from the healed man and assumed by Jesus
4. The *conclusion/interpretation* (5:15-18), which tells of the man identifying Jesus to the Jewish authorities.<sup>4</sup>

We read in **verse 1**, "***After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.***" Last week we read of Jesus and His disciples arriving in Galilee after departing Samaria, and now we read of Jesus leaving Galilee once again to return to Jerusalem.

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<sup>3</sup> F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 122.

<sup>4</sup> The episode may continue through verse 18, or even further. But for our purposes we have drawn the close with verse 15.

We spoke last week about the Lord's instruction in the Law of Moses that the Jewish men were to travel to Jerusalem in order to worship at three annual feasts. It should be noted that another (a fourth) feast was observed annually that had been established after the completion of the writing of the Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament). This was the eight day Feast of Dedication, or the Feast of Lights, which commemorated the rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabaeus in 165 BC. The identity of the specific feast mentioned here in John 5:1 is not possible. As one wrote,

The central chapters of the Gospel of John are chronologically related to various festivals of the Jewish year; cf. John 6:4 (Passover), 7:2 (Tabernacles), 10:22 (Dedication), 11:55 (Passover again). As for the festival here, its identification is quite uncertain.<sup>5</sup>

We mentioned **verse 2** earlier, which again reads, "*Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches.*" The name of this pool, Bethesda, has been adopted by numerous hospitals. Bethesda literally means, "House of Mercy."<sup>6</sup> It is understandable that hospitals are named after the place where our Lord healed this man of his infirmity.

One of the most difficult and challenging places in the world for archaeologists is old Jerusalem. But some have thought that this pool was located where there were actually twin pools beneath St. Anne's Monastery.

The pools were as large as a football field and about twenty feet deep. The "five porticos" represent a (covered) porch on each of the four sides and one separating the two pools, perhaps separating men and women. Porticoes, like public baths in the ancient world, were open to the public and were gathering places for beggars and other people.<sup>7</sup>

**Verse 3** reads, "*In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed,* [waiting for the moving of the water]. The list seems to encompass all manner of sickness and infirmity. There were multitudes of these broken, hurting, suffering people lying about, with little hope except of the false hope they put in the imagined stirring of the water by an angel. Here "we then see more adequately all the wretchedness, the misery, the broken lives that form the result of sin among men."<sup>8</sup> We also see the helplessness of man to deal with the effects of sin apart from the mercy and grace of God in Jesus Christ.

We considered earlier that **verse 4** should not be regarded as original with John ["For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had."]

With the abundance of evidence that pagan religion regularly used healing shrines with water as a regular component, it is not unlikely that this tradition is rooted in folk legend, possibly even a popular Jewish tradition. Although such folk practices would not have been supported by the Jewish establishment, Theissen is probably correct when he suggests that in this scene "Jesus is in competition with the ancient healing sanctuaries." Even beyond its origin, this foreign addition was almost certainly added to explain verse 7.<sup>9</sup>

We then read **verse 5**, "*Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years.*" The text does not tell how old this man was. It only records how long he had suffered this malady—38 years. He had suffered long with this difficulty, who was yet hoping to be delivered from his infirmity.

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce, p. 121.

<sup>6</sup> The note in the Reformation Study Bible defines Bethesda as the "house of grace/steadfast love."

<sup>7</sup> Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 269.

<sup>8</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel** (Augsburg Publishing, 1942), p. 361.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 269f.

But that measure of hope was based on uncertainty and was itself, therefore, very weak and less than inspiring to the man.

Some have sought to allegorize this miracle. They have said that the 38 years is an allusion to the years Israel was in the wilderness after they had left Egypt and traveled to the Promised Land. Some go further and say the five porches represent the five books of Moses, the Torah, which Israel failed to keep. There is no clear evidence in the text that this should be allegorized. It is a miracle story to glorify Jesus Christ as the Son of the Living God.

There may be, however, a point of evidence of contrasting the power of Jesus with the uncertainty of being healed by these waters. And there has been a recurring emphasis in John's Gospel on the weakness of water to further the work of God among His people. Jesus turned the "water" into wine at the wedding in Cana, He offered the life-giving Spirit in contrast to the "water" in Jacob's well. And now we see Jesus healing a man of his infirmity, and that at a place the "water" had failed to affect his healing.

**Verse 6** records our Lord approaching this man to heal him. *"When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, 'Do you want to be made well?'"*

The Lord had compassion on this man. Jesus knew that he had been in this condition a long time. John does not tell us how Jesus knew. John just stated the matter forthrightly. Jesus knew he had suffered a long time. Jesus purposed that on this day He would bring an end to the prolonged time of suffering of this man.

Jesus asked him the question, "Do you want to be made well?"

What we have here is a snapshot of a man doomed for years to powerlessness on account of an incurable illness, looking in vain for a miracle to happen, who had no one (or no one left?) to assist him in his predicament. To such a person Jesus comes with a question, a question full of power and promise: "Do you want to be healed?"<sup>10</sup>

By the way, here we see a manifestation of distinguishing grace bestowed by the Lord Jesus. There was a *"great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed"* which Jesus passed by. But He came to a stop before this man with the purpose of healing him. Jesus took the initiative. The man did not seek out Jesus. Jesus saw him and directed His healing power to be experienced by him.

So it is with you and me who have been the objects of God's saving power. There were probably many like ourselves, sinful beyond hope of remedy. But the Lord passed by many and came to us, came to you, and He took the initiative to impart spiritual life to your soul. The Lord alone gets the glory for what He has done in our lives. He came to us. He found us. And He caused us to be healed of our spiritual malady.

We then read in **verse 7**, *"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.'"* This man must have thought that God's favor was always on someone else, on someone other than himself. He had no one to help him, and he thought that this was his main problem. Some people go through life thinking that someone else is going to have to do something remarkable for them, or it will not happen. No, this man needed the Lord, who alone could affect his cure.

But there is something more about this man's understanding of God and the nature of His power to heal. He regarded God's power as impersonal, that God's power was from time to time infused in water, which was only assessable to the one who entered the water first. But Jesus shows that the power of God to heal was not impersonal, but was very personal. And the power of God was not something that was magical in nature that could be accessed by just anybody who first stepped forward. God's power to heal was in Jesus Christ, which He would exercise to whom He purposed to bless.

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<sup>10</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John; A Theological Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 186.

**Verses 8 and 9** very briefly and tersely states what happened: *“Jesus said to him, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk.’<sup>9</sup> And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.”*

Here is a clear case when Jesus healed the man before faith was placed in Him. The Lord often healed when someone exercised faith in Him, but He also healed people apart from faith.

The Lord gave three orders to this man. First, Jesus said unto him *“rise.”* He was immediately healed of his lame condition. There is an Old Testament prophecy that anticipated the work of the Messiah when He would come to His people. In **Isaiah 35:6** we read,

Then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
And the tongue of the dumb sing.  
For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness,  
And streams in the desert.

The man is instantly and completely cured. The Lord issued a command and the man obeyed. This healing was rather unique from some others recorded in the Gospels.

This healing differs from many others in that, not only is there no mention of faith on the part of the man, but there seems to be no room for it. The man did not even know Jesus’ name (v. 13). Moreover right up till Jesus uttered the critical words his thoughts were centered on healing through getting into the pool (v. 7). We must feel that, while faith was commonly the prerequisite of healing, it was not absolutely necessary. Jesus is not limited by man as He works the works of God.<sup>11</sup>

Second, Jesus told him to *“take up your bed.”* For many years this bed roll had born him. Now he would bear his bed roll.

“For the paralytic man to carry his bed pallet home meant a reversal in fortunes: no longer does the bed carry a powerless man but, with vitality to spare, he (triumphantly) carries the bed.<sup>12</sup>

And then third, Jesus commanded the man, *walk.*” It is understandable that this man would immediately and without question comply with the directive of this One who had so remarkably healed him. But it was Jesus’ command for him to take up his bed and walk that resulted in great trouble before the Jewish authorities. This command of Jesus precipitated the conflict with the Jewish leaders. Was it intentional, or ill-advised on His part? Of course it was not ill-advised. It was most certainly intentional.

But did not Jesus go too far when He told the man to carry away his bed? Would it not, in view of the faultfinding it would surely arouse on the part of the Sanhedrists, have been wiser to let the man abandon his bed and go without it? As regards the second question, it is plainly Jesus’ intention to oppose, openly and positively, both the human traditions and the false spirit of the Jewish leaders. One must study their barren, legalistic, and casuistic methods of building up a hedge of human traditions or regulations around the law of God, in order to see how utterly impossible it was for Jesus to avoid clashing with the exponents of these traditions. They found thirty kinds of labor forbidden on the Sabbath and they insisted on these prohibitions, deduced from their own wisdom, in such a way as to lose sight of the law’s chief requirements and true spiritual intention. Jesus could have lived in peace with these men only by submitting to their spirit and their methods, and this was an utter impossibility. So He even invites the conflict.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 303f.

<sup>12</sup> Ridderbos, p. 186.

<sup>13</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel** (Augsburg Publishing, 1942), p. 366.

Our Lord precipitated this conflict. In this way this miracle became a sign to the Jews, even the third sign out of the seven that are recorded in this Fourth Gospel.

For the miracle wrought at Bethesda was not intended only for the man upon whom it was wrought but for as many as should see this man. It was a *sign* to the Jews. As such it was intended, while in no way transgressing God's law, to run counter to the false Jewish traditions and thus to turn men's hearts—if they would be turned at all—to the true authority of Jesus, who, while upholding God's law, brought to view the mercy which both heals the sufferer's body and sets free his soul from spiritual bondage. Such was the significance of the sign set before the eyes of the men in Jerusalem: a man marvelously healed carrying his bed before men's eyes through the streets to his home, on the Sabbath!<sup>14</sup>

We then read in **verses 9b and 10**, "*And that day was the Sabbath. <sup>10</sup>The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, 'It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed.'*"

We cannot understand or appreciate the intensity of this conflict unless we are aware of the supreme and extreme significance that Judaism placed on Sabbath observance.

In whatever respect Pharisaism may have been tolerant, in regard to the Sabbath it was uncompromising. The casuistry as to what was and was not allowed on the Sabbath had been refined to the smallest details. In the Mishnaic tractate on the Sabbath carrying objects from one domain to another was expressly forbidden.

In addition to the Hebrew Scriptures (which is our Old Testament), the Jews held as their authority over all matters of faith and practice the historic oral tradition of the Jews, sometimes called, "the Tradition of the elders." This was the long-held, long-taught interpretations and applications of the Law of Moses to everyday life. It had very rigid and detailed stipulations on daily Jewish life. This tradition had been acquired and accumulated over five centuries of Jewish history, since the return of a remnant of Jews from the Babylonian captivity. It was sometimes referred to as the "oral tradition", which was taught, rehearsed and repeated, and passed on from generation to generation.

The oral tradition would eventually be written down and codified around A.D. 200 by a man named **Rabbi Jehuda**. It would then become called the **Mishna**. The Mishna recorded (1) historic decisions of Jewish rabbis on particular cases of the Jewish religion and practice and (2) commentary on passages from the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Old Testament). The Mishna had six orders or divisions, including the categories of "Seeds", "Set Feasts", "Women", "Damages" (or Injuries), "Hallowed Things", and "Cleansings" (Purifications). As time passed, it was seen to be necessary to explain more fully and apply more specifically the contents of the Mishna. And so, Commentaries on the Mishna were created, at first orally transmitted and then written down. These writings came to be known as the **Gemara**. The rabbinical school of Jerusalem eventually combined the Mishna and the Gemara, which came to be known as the **Jerusalem** or the **Palestinian Talmud**. The rabbis in the region of Babylonia developed a Talmud that was about 4 times longer than the Jerusalem Talmud. When the Talmud is mentioned in which it is not preceded by the word "Jerusalem" or "Palestinian", it is a reference to the **Babylonian Talmud**.

"The Tradition of the elders" was viewed as authoritative as the written Hebrew Scriptures. The Tradition was viewed as a "fence" about the law. It set forth stipulations and practices that if a person followed its precepts, he could be "assured" that he was not breaking God's law. As such, it required far more than what the law required. In fact, the Tradition of the elders came to be viewed as more important

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 367.

and authoritative than the Scriptures themselves. There is a passage in the Talmud that reads, “To be against the words of the scribes is more punishable than to be against the word of the Bible.”<sup>15</sup>

The Tradition of the Jews had very many detailed regulations governing Sabbath Day observance. And being accused of breaking their Sabbath Day laws was no trifle charge, for the penalty of such an infraction was public flogging or execution. The Pharisees may not object to the activity itself, only that it was done on Saturday, the Sabbath Day, a day of rest on which no work whatsoever was to be performed. Here we see the excessive legalism of this religious group being displayed. They regarded what this man was doing to be illegal work, and therefore prohibited to be done on the Sabbath.

The Pharisees were extreme in this regard. They would not live by principle that the Sabbath was a day in which work generally was set aside for the purpose of rest; they would stipulate and define precisely what constituted work and impose their rules and penalty for infractions on the people of God. Over the course of years, the legalistic element in Judaism established **39 categories** of what they regarded as work. Each category had **6 minor categories**, each minor category had a list of specific laws prohibiting specific activities, **234 violations** in all.

The Jew leaders did not ask directly why this man was carrying his bed, they levelled an accusation. Again, verse 10 reads, “The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, “It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed.” This man was being accused and threatened. He was in immediate danger for what he was doing.

He had a good answer to their question. We read in **verse 11**, “*He answered them, ‘He who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your bed and walk.’”*” This explanation did not exonerate this man of his “crime” in their eyes, but it did deflect his accusers to focus on a greater culprit, one who would perform the work of healing someone on the Sabbath.

The man defended himself against the charge of Sabbath-breaking by the plea that he was acting by another’s command. The lifting of his pallet, in fact, was one of the conditions for his cure. But in reply there may be the implication that one who was able to work such a cure must be possessed of peculiar authority, and that to obey such a person’s command seemed a clear duty.

The man’s defence did not indeed exonerate him in the eyes of the custodians if the law, but at least it suggested that the primary responsibility for his action lay with the person who told him to perform it.<sup>16</sup>

We read in **verses 12 and 13**, “*Then they asked him, ‘Who is the Man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’’* <sup>13</sup>*But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place.”*

The man did not know who Jesus was nor did he know His name. Our Lord did not wait around after the miracle to receive the praise of men for what He had done, or perhaps to hear further requests that He would do for others what He had done for this man. The Lord slipped away in the reaction of the crowd that must have taken place.

The Jews were angered when they learned that Jesus had commanded this man “to violate the Sabbath Day.” “For these Jews Jesus is not the man who healed this great sufferer, who bestowed on him divine mercy, but a man who broke their traditions and had to be punished.”<sup>17</sup>

**Verse 14** records that Jesus sought out this man. “*Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, ‘See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.’”*

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted from the Talmud by A. T. Robertson, **The Pharisees and Jesus**, p. 130, according to William Hendriksen, **Matthew**, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1973), p. 614.

<sup>16</sup> F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 125.

<sup>17</sup> Lenski, p. 369.

Jesus found the man in the temple. It would seem that Jesus sought him out and found him. Here he was, a man made whole. It is very probable that he was in the temple to give formal thanksgiving to God for having healed him of his infirmity.

Jesus announced to the man, “You have been made well.” God had been good and gracious to him. The perfect tense of the Greek verb, “made well” speaks of the man having been made completely well when Jesus spoke to him at the pool of Bethesda.

What may be suggested here is that this man’s infirmity had been originally the result of sin that he had committed. Yes, all disease and sickness exists because of sin, but the infirmity of a particular person cannot in every instance be attributed to a specific sin of the one who is suffering. But it might be that this was the case with this man.

In 9:1ff Jesus repudiates the idea that disasters like blindness are inevitably caused by sin. In this present verse He seems to imply that the man’s sin had brought about his infirmity. Sinning may bring a worse fate. Jesus may mean a worse physical fate. But it is more likely that He is referring to the eternal consequences of sin. They are indeed “a worse thing” than any physical handicap.<sup>18</sup>

Jesus warned this man about continuing to sin now that he was made whole. Sometimes that is what the medical profession does. It heals people so that they can go on in their sinful lifestyles. This is what moved **D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones** (1899-1981) to leave the medical profession as a young man and enter the pastoral ministry. Lloyd-Jones was Welsh-born. He preached at the Westminster Chapel in London from WWII onward, having been the hand-picked replacement to the pulpit by the previous pastor, G. Campbell Morgan. Before Lloyd-Jones was a preacher, he was a physician, serving as an assistant to Lord Horder, the King’s physician. He practiced medicine with the aristocracy of London. One of the things that stirred him to preach the gospel was that *he saw himself treating people who were ill mostly due to the sinful lifestyles they were living*. For a number of weeks young Lloyd-Jones had worked on an assignment that Lord Horder had given to him. He was to work through Horder’s case histories reclassifying them according to the disease of each patient. But when doing so, Lloyd-Jones realized from Horder’s notes that 70% of the cases could not be classified under recognizable medical criteria at all. Rather, Horder would put down as the cause for sickness, “Eats too much,” “Drinks too much” and similar comments. He felt he was patching them up so that they could go on in sin.

How did the man respond to Jesus after He had revealed Himself to him in the temple? We read in **verse 15**, “*The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.*” It would seem that the man, perhaps out of fear for himself and in order to ingratiate himself with the Jewish leaders, went to them and identified Jesus. It might appear to be the case of a clear betrayal. However, where the Jewish leaders wanted to know who it was that had commanded him to take up his bed and walk, this man accentuated the positive work Jesus had done for him. He told the Jews that it was Jesus “who had made him well.” It may be that he simply wanted his spiritual leaders who it was that had so wonderfully healed him of his long-term infirmity.

## **II. Several Lessons from our passage**

1. We are taught in this passage *the terrible effects of sin upon the human race*. We read this passage of the multitudes that lay around this pool of water, each and every one suffering some significant malady. But every affliction seen was the result ultimately of sin. Sin entered the world and so sickness comes upon its heels. The greatest need is not healing of that which people suffer, but forgiveness and deliverance from sin, which leads them to suffering.

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<sup>18</sup> Morris, p. 307.

2. Now the Lord often shows mercy to people at various times in their lives. Perhaps He gives a recovery from sickness, or a remarkable deliverance from some life-threatening experience. We should view these occasions as God telling us that we should amend our ways or to watch our steps in the future. Jesus says to you and me, “*Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.*”

3. Although we may have suffered difficulty in this life, none of us have encountered the full wrath of God that awaits any and all who die in their sins. We pity those who perished in those terrible fires in California. Dozens and dozens were overtaken by fire and perished. But for those without Christ, that was just the beginning of sorrows. The Word of God speaks of the eternal wrath upon all who die without Jesus Christ as their Savior. The Lord Jesus said,

“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. <sup>43</sup>If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched-- <sup>44</sup>where ‘Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.’” (Mk. 9:40-44)

4. Let us repudiate superstition in all of its forms. It is dishonoring to God to believe such dribble and it brings no true benefit to the soul. If healing does come, and if it’s imagined to have occurred due to some magical or superstitious event or thing that we have done, we are just deluding ourselves and dishonoring God.

5. Some of the Lord’s people suffer prolonged physical maladies from which they will never be relieved in this life. One day every true Christian will experience healing even more remarkable than what this man experienced. These miracles of Jesus portended the future deliverance of all of His people from all that has ever troubled them and caused them loss and pain. But like this man, it may be a prolonged time before that deliverance comes. But it will most certainly come. In the eternal state there will arrive,

“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” (Rev. 21:4)

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The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.  
My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen. (1 Cor. 16:23)

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