

Opening Words

The story of the healing at the Pool of Bethesda in John 5 is a powerful challenge because it teaches many things about us. Who are we like in the story? Let's try to discover that today.

OSL 038 Power at the Pool of Bethesda 2

Pilgrims were flooding into Jerusalem. Outside the city gates the lame and the sick gathered around a pool of water called Bethesda. They were hoping for a miracle. They were hoping an angel or a spirit would bring healing power to the water so they could be healed. Well, as we know, healing came to the Pool that day, but not by an angel, but because Jesus came, and he healed a man who had been crippled for 38 years.

But the healing took place on the Sabbath. Plus, Jesus had told the man to pick up the mat on which he lay and to carry it home. This was strictly forbidden by the authorities for they considered it work, and people must not work on the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was indeed a law given by God to his people. It was given for their benefit. It was given that they might rest, and it was a commemoration of the great release from Egypt at the Exodus. But human tendency is to go to an extreme. One extreme is to disregard the laws of God. Another extreme is to turn the beneficial laws of God into rigid structures that confine and enslave people with needless rules.

The Jewish people had gone to the extreme of making the Sabbath laws rigid and enslaving. Some Jewish people were so devout about not working on the Sabbath that during a time of war, they refused to use their weapons against the enemy. On that day, Syrian troops massacred 1000 Jewish men who refused to defend themselves! This application of the law was later changed. A person could defend himself on the Sabbath. Troops in a time of war could fight on the Sabbath to save life. But any work done on the Sabbath that could be put off to another day, must be put off to another day.

On this Sabbath day, Jesus healed a man! And as we saw in our previous lesson, when the man picked up his mat and went into the city, he got into trouble with the authorities! He told them his story, that someone who did not identify himself healed him, but that this man told him to pick up his mat and go home.

I am sure they knew it was Jesus, but they told the man that if he saw this healer, he should report it to them. And that's what happened. Later that day, Jesus found him in the Temple. Let's try to imagine the conversation they had.

"Shalom, my friend, I see that you are quite well and walking, and you have come to the right place, the temple of our God."

"Yes. But how did you do it? How did you heal me? And who are you? What is your name?"

“I am Jesus from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. But as to how I did it? My Father in me does his works and I do what he does. My Father in heaven has healed you. And now, you have done right in coming to worship him. He has made you well. Live righteously. Sin no more. He has blessed you greatly. God’s kingdom has come into the world. God is extending his hand in mercy to those in need. The sick are made well. The lame walk. The blind see. He is beginning his great work to make all things new. He has made you a new man. He wants to make Israel new, but Israel must sin no more or a great catastrophe will come. You must sin no more lest a worse catastrophe than your lameness come upon you.”

The man listened to Jesus and they parted ways. He did not fully understand all that Jesus had said, and as he thought on his words, he saw the priests and other religious leaders approaching him.

“Well, did you find out who healed you?”

“Yes, I did. His name is Jesus of Nazareth, and he had many wonderful things to say ...”

But the man could not finish his report.

“Acck! Jesus! We might have known! Tell the brothers to be on the lookout! Jesus is here and he has healed a man on the Sabbath.”

The man who had been healed probably wondered at their anger, but he went home, a new man, while the religious leaders went to find Jesus, and when they did, they picked a fight with him. John 5:16 says that they persecuted him.

“Jesus, we have heard reports about you and your behavior today confirms what we have heard. You have told a man to break the Sabbath by commanding him to carry his bedding! And you have broken the Sabbath by healing a man on this day.”

What blindness these men had! A wonderful event had just taken place, and we read in John 5:17 that Jesus said, “My Father is working on this very day, and I too am working.”

The Jewish people had many thoughts about what God did or did not do on the Sabbath. Yes, it says that on the seventh day he rested, and that he hallowed that day, but they also knew that God must maintain his creation. Some believed that he renewed his creation every day. Some looked upon his miracles, and said that God continued to work, he continued to judge, and he had every right to do what he wanted to do on the Sabbath. And this is what Jesus was claiming. He was saying that God, his Father was the one who did the miracle on the Sabbath day. But it was not just that he said that God was working. He said, “My Father is working, and I too am working.”

This upset the authorities even more because Jesus was claiming to be the special agent through which God worked, and we read in the rest of the chapter some of the most amazing statements in the Gospel of John, indeed, in all of the New Testament.

In verses 19-20, Jesus says that he only does what the Father is doing. Whatever he sees the Father doing, that is what he will do. He also said that the Father loved him and that the Father would show him even greater works! What would these greater works be? If you have your Bible and if

you are in John 5, you can see in verse 21 that Jesus speaks about giving life to people and raising the dead. In verse 22, he says that the Father has delegated all judgment to him, and in verse 23 he says that everyone will honor him just as they honor the Father. But when we get to verse 24, we find the words that should give us all great joy. Jesus said, “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.” Eternal life. Jesus has come not just to heal a man who was lame for 38 years, he has come to heal all of us from the more dreadful infirmity of sin and death. He has come to give us eternal life!

I ask you who are listening today, “Have you received this gift of eternal life? Have you heard the words of Jesus and believed in him and in his Father? If not, why not bow your heart to him right now, confess your sin, and call upon him to be your Savior and your Lord.

Let’s keep moving now in the rest of the passage. In verses 25-30, Jesus reiterated what he said before. He will give life to people. He will raise the dead. He is the judge. In other words, what happened on that Sabbath Day, though significant, was little compared to what would happen in the future, and he was only doing these things because he was seeking to do what pleased his Father in heaven.

Then, in verses 31-39, Jesus lists four witnesses that prove that his words are true. This was important for him to share. In his world, for a man to claim things for himself was not considered an honorable thing to say. Self-boasting was offensive. It was better for others to make claims about you. Jesus knows this, so he mentions four witnesses that corroborated what he just said.

1. First, is the testimony of his Father which is in verses 31-32. This testimony was heard at his baptism.
2. Second, is the testimony of John. This is in 33-35. John bore witness that Jesus was the Messiah, and he did this when he said that he saw the heavens open and the Spirit of God come upon Jesus and remain upon him.
3. Third, is the witness of his works. The miracles that he had performed proved that his words were true. They could not deny that the man who had been lame for 38 years was a tremendous work of power. This is in verse 36.
4. Fourth, is the witness of Scripture which he refers to in verses 37-39. He said that the Scriptures were written about him.

There you have it – four witnesses, not the two or three that the Law demanded, but four – The Father, John the Baptist, his miracles, and the Scriptures.

But they did not believe him! And in verse 40-47 we read the words of Jesus that explain why the people did not believe. He says they did not have the love of God in their hearts. He says that they were seeking the glory that came from other people rather than seeking the glory of God. Pride and selfishness. Their lives were controlled by these twin sins. These sins had such a grip on them that when their Messiah was standing in front of them, having done an amazing work of power, they could not see him.

There was one more sin that they had – it was the sin of unbelief. Jesus said in verses 46-47, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?” They claimed to know Scripture, and they knew it in their heads, but not in their hearts. Their heart was full of unbelief, selfishness, and pride. They would not believe in the words of Moses. They would not believe the words of the Messiah.

But as I close, I turn my attention to you. What about you? Do you believe?

This story of the healing at the Pool of Bethesda is a powerful challenge because it teaches many things about us. Who are we like in the story? Are we like the crippled man in desperate need of the touch of God? Are we like the self-righteous religious people who could not see the work of God?

My friends, I hope that you will not make the mistake those men made so long ago. The kingdom of God has come. The Messiah has come. John testified of him. The Father in heaven testified of him. The scriptures were fulfilled. The mighty works of power testified of him, and the greatest event of all testified of him – for three days after he was crucified, he rose from the dead.

Jesus is Lord. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus continues to make all things new in this world. Jesus wants to make your life new. Will you receive this testimony today? Will you receive him, and will you follow him?