

John 5:1-18
June 8, 2025

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

We are going to read a well-known passage about a man who had been an invalid for 38 years. It's a great reminder that people are "paralyzed" or waiting for healing in their lives.

Q: What has been your experience of waiting or seeking healing, whether it's physical, emotional or spiritual? Have you been praying for healing for years? Or did you reach a point where you stopped praying for it? [Let people engage]

Transition: Jesus's encounter with the invalid raises interesting questions for us to consider:

- Did Jesus ask an obvious question to the invalid by asking if he wanted to be healed?
- What does the man's 38-year disability teach us about waiting for healing?
- Where do non-believers go to find healing?

There is plenty to explore, so let's read the text and we'll begin to process it.

BOOK:

The Healing at the Pool

5 Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews.

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.

³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.

⁵ 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?"

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."

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,

¹⁰ and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "**It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.**"

¹¹ But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' "

¹² So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?"

¹³ **The man who was healed had no idea who it was**, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

¹⁴ Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

Life Through the Son

¹⁶ So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him.

¹⁷ Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”

¹⁸ For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

It was a significant question Jesus asked of the lame man by the pool. “Do you want to be healed?” Do not too easily reply, “Well, of course he did.” He who had received alms and been carried on the backs of others for 38 years would have to go to work. Was he ready for that?

Whoever receives the gift of eternal life from Christ has to be prepared to accept the burdens of maturity. With growth comes responsibility, self-giving, perplexity, disappointment. It is no easy thing to come into his kingdom. His is not a cheap salvation. It is a costly crusade. John is fond of this idea.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today’s Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 304-306). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

THE MAN WHO WAS EQUAL WITH GOD - John 5

Our Lord's first two miracles recorded by John were somewhat private in nature. The servants and the disciples knew that He transformed the water into wine, and the servants and the nobleman's family knew that He had healed the sick son. The miracle recorded in John 5 was not only public, but it was performed on the Sabbath Day and incited the opposition of the religious leaders. We see here the beginning of "official persecution" against the Savior. There are three exciting "acts" in this drama.

The Cure (John 5:1–15)

When you visit St. Anne's Church in Jerusalem, they will show you the deep excavation that has revealed the ancient Pool of Bethesda. The Hebrew name *Bethesda* has been spelled various ways and given differing meanings. Some say it means "house of mercy" or "house of grace," but others say it means "place of the two outpourings." There is historical and archeological evidence that two adjacent pools of water served this area in ancient times.

The pool is situated near the northeast corner of the Old City, close to the Sheep Gate (Neh. 3:1; 12:39). Perhaps John saw some spiritual significance to this location, for he had already told his readers that Jesus Christ is "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29).

We do not know which feast Jesus was observing when He went to Jerusalem, and it is not important that we know. His main purpose for going was not to maintain a religious tradition but to heal a man and use the miracle as the basis for a message to the people. The miracle illustrated what He said in John 5:24—the power of His Word and the gift of life.

While it is true that some manuscripts omit the end of John 5:3 and all of verse 4, it is also true that the event (and the man's words in John 5:7) would make little sense if these words are eliminated. **Why would anybody, especially a man sick for so many years, remain in one place if nothing special were occurring? You would think that after thirty-eight years of nothing happening to anybody, the man would go elsewhere and stop hoping!** It seems wisest for us to accept the fact that something extraordinary kept all these handicapped people at this pool, hoping for a cure.

John described these people as "impotent, blind, lame, paralyzed." What havoc sin has wrought in this world! But the healing of these infirmities was one of the prophesied ministries of the Messiah (Isa. 35:3–6). Had the religious leaders known their own Scriptures, they would have recognized their Redeemer; but they were spiritually blind.

No matter how you look at this miracle, it is an illustration of the grace of God. It was grace that brought Jesus to the Pool of Bethesda, for who would want to mingle with a crowd of helpless people! Jesus did not heal all of them; He singled out one man and healed him. The fact that Jesus came to the man, spoke to him, healed him, and then met him later in the temple is proof of His wonderful grace and mercy.

John noted that the man had been ill for thirty-eight years. Perhaps he saw in this a picture of his own Jewish nation that had wandered in the wilderness for thirty-eight years (Deut. 2:14). Spiritually speaking, Israel was a nation of impotent people, waiting hopelessly for something to happen.

Jesus knew about the man (see John 2:23–24) and asked him if he wanted to be healed. You would think that the man would have responded with an enthusiastic, “Yes! I want to be healed!” But, instead, he began to give excuses! He had been in that sad condition for so long that his will was as paralyzed as his body. But if you compare John 5:6 with verse 40, you will see that Jesus had a spiritual lesson in mind as well. Indeed, this man did illustrate the tragic spiritual state of the nation.

The Lord healed him through the power of His spoken word. He commanded the man to do the very thing he was unable to do, but in His command was the power of fulfillment (see Mark 3:5; Heb. 4:12). The cure was immediate and certainly some of the many people at the pool must have witnessed it. Jesus did not pause to heal anyone else; instead, He “moved away” (John 5:13) so as not to create a problem. (The Greek word means “to dodge.”)

The miracle would have caused no problem except that it occurred on the Sabbath Day. Our Lord certainly could have come a day earlier, or even waited a day; but He wanted to get the attention of the religious leaders. Later, He would deliberately heal a blind man on the Sabbath (John 9:1–14). The scribes had listed thirty-nine tasks that were prohibited on the Sabbath, and carrying a burden was one of them. Instead of rejoicing at the wonderful deliverance of the man, the religious leaders condemned him for carrying his bed and thereby breaking the law.

It is not easy to understand the relationship between this man and Jesus. There is no evidence that he believed on Christ and was converted, yet we cannot say that he was opposed to the Savior. In fact, he did not even know who it was that healed him until Jesus met him in the temple. No doubt the man went there to give thanks to God and to offer the appropriate sacrifices. It seems strange that the man did not actively seek a closer relationship with the One who healed him, but more than one person has gratefully accepted the gift and ignored the Giver.

Did the man “inform” on Jesus because of fear? We do not know. The Jewish leaders at least turned from him and aimed their accusations at Jesus Christ; and, unlike the healed blind man in John 9, this man was not excommunicated. The Lord’s words (John 5:14) suggest that the man’s physical plight had been the result of sin; but Jesus did not say that the man’s sins had been forgiven as He did in dealing with the sick man lowered through the roof (see Mark 2:1–12). It is possible to experience an exciting miracle and still not be saved and go to heaven!

The Controversy (John 5:16–18)

The Jewish leaders did not prosecute the man who was healed, even though he had broken the law; but they did begin to persecute the Lord Jesus. As the guardians of the faith, the members of the Jewish Sanhedrin (the religious ruling council) had the responsibility of investigating new preachers and teachers who appeared in the land, lest some false prophet come along and lead the people astray. They had looked into the ministry of John the Baptist (John 1:19ff) and more recently had been scrutinizing the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus had healed a demoniac on the Sabbath (Luke 4:31–37), so the Sanhedrin was already suspicious. In the days following the miracle recorded in John 5, Jesus would defend His disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1–8), and would heal a man’s withered hand

on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:9–14). He deliberately challenged the legalistic traditions of the scribes and Pharisees. They had taken the Sabbath—God’s gift to man—and had transformed it into a prison house of regulations and restrictions.

When they confronted Jesus with His unlawful conduct, He simply replied that He was doing only what His Father was doing! God’s Sabbath rest had been broken by man’s sin (see Gen. 3); and ever since the fall of man, God has been seeking lost sinners and saving them. But when Jesus said “My Father” instead of the usual “our Father,” used by the Jews, He claimed to be equal with God.

The Jewish leaders instantly understood His claim, and they changed their accusation from that of Sabbath-breaking to blasphemy, because Jesus claimed to be God. Liberal theologians who say that Jesus never claimed to be God have a difficult time with this passage.

Of course, the penalty for such blasphemy was death. It is here that the “official persecution” of Jesus began, culminating in His crucifixion. In the days that followed, our Lord often confronted His enemies with their evil desire to kill Him (John 7:19, 25; 8:37, 59). They hated Him without a cause (John 15:18–25). They ignored the good deeds that He performed for the helpless and hopeless, and centered their attention on destroying Him.

Jesus made Himself equal with God because He is God. This is the theme of John’s Gospel. The Jewish leaders could not disprove His claims, so they tried to destroy Him and get Him out of the way. Both in His crucifixion and His resurrection, Jesus openly affirmed His deity and turned His enemies’ weapons against them.

British writer George MacDonald pointed out that John 5:17 gives us a profound insight into our Lord’s miracles. Jesus did *instantly* what the Father is always doing slowly. For example, in nature, as mentioned earlier, the Father is slowly turning water into wine; but Jesus did it instantly. Through the powers in nature, the Father is healing broken bodies; but Jesus healed them immediately. Nature is repeatedly multiplying bread, from sowing to harvest; but Jesus multiplied it instantly in His own hands.

Blum, E. A. (1985). *John*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 288-290) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

1. Jesus’ healing of a paralytic (5:1–15).

5:1. **Jesus ... later returned to Jerusalem for a feast.** The feast is not named (some manuscripts read “the feast”), but it may have been the Passover. Jesus attended three other Passovers (2:23; 6:4; 11:55). John probably intended only to give a reason why Jesus was in Jerusalem.

5:2. To the north of the temple area was a **pool ... called Bethesda** (see the map showing the pool’s location). The excavations of a pool **near the Sheep Gate** have uncovered **five** porticoes or **covered colonnades**, confirming the accuracy of the description given here in the Fourth Gospel. The pool was actually two pools next to each other.

5:3a. The **great number of disabled people** pictures the sad spiritual plight of the world.

5:3b–4. The earliest manuscripts omit these words which appear to be a late insertion to explain why the pool water was “stirred” (v. 7). People believed that an angel came and stirred it. According to local tradition, the first one in the water would be healed. But the Bible nowhere teaches this kind of superstition, a situation which would be a most cruel contest for many ill people. No extant Greek manuscript before a.d. 400 contains these words.

5:5. Jesus picked a certain invalid on a Sabbath Day (v. 9) at a feast time, a man who had been afflicted **for 38 years**. John did not say what kind of physical problem he had or if he was **an invalid** from birth. In any case his condition was hopeless.

5:6. The word **learned** does not mean that **Jesus** received facts from others. It means that He perceived the situation by His knowledge (the Gr. is *gnous*, “knowing”; cf. 1:48; 2:24–25; 4:18). Jesus’ seemingly strange question, **Do you want to get well?** was designed to focus the man’s attention on Him, to stimulate his will, and to raise his hopes. **In the spiritual realm man’s great problem is that either he does not recognize he is sick (cf. Isa. 1:5–6; Luke 5:31) or he does not want to be cured.** People are often happy, for a while at least, in their sins.

5:7. The man replied that he lacked not the desire but the means to be healed. Without strength and without friends, he could not be helped **when the pool water was stirred**. He had tried but without success.

5:8. **Jesus then said ... Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.** His command carried with it the required enablement. As with dead Lazarus (11:43), Jesus’ word accomplished His will. This illustrates conversion. When people obey His command to believe, God works in and through His Word.

5:9–10. God’s supernatural power was evident in the man’s instantaneous cure. **He picked up his mat and walked.** Muscles long atrophied were completely restored. Isaiah prophesied that in the days of the Messiah the lame would “leap like a deer” (Isa. 35:1–7). Here in Jerusalem was a public sign that the Messiah had come.

The Sabbath was a central issue in the conflicts between Jesus and His opponents (cf. Mark 2:23; 3:4). The Mosaic Law required that work cease on the seventh day. Additional laws were added by later Jewish religious authorities, which became very complicated and burdensome. **These human traditions often obscured the divine intention in God’s Law.** “The Sabbath was made for man” (Mark 2:27) so that he could have rest and a time for worship and joy. The Jews’ rigid tradition (not the Old Testament) taught that if anyone carried anything from a public place to a private place on the Sabbath intentionally, he deserved death by stoning. In this case the man who was healed was in danger of losing his life.

5:11. The healed man realized this difficulty and tried to evade any responsibility for violating tradition by saying he was just following orders.

5:12–13. The authorities were naturally interested in the identity of **this fellow who told** the invalid to violate their rules. But **the man ... had no** knowledge of Jesus. This seems to be a case in which healing was done in the absence of faith. The invalid was chosen by **Jesus** as an act of grace because of his need and also to display God’s glory in him. Jesus then **had slipped away into the crowd** (cf. 8:59; 10:39; 12:35), so momentarily He was unknown.

5:14–15. **Jesus** later **found** the healed man in **the temple** area. This implied that Jesus sought him out in order to speak to him. The ex-paralytic seemed to have no gratitude to Jesus: his conduct put him in a bad light. **Jesus’ warning (Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you)** does not mean that his paralysis was caused by any specific sin (cf. 9:3), though all disease and death come ultimately from sin. The warning was that his tragic life of 38 years as an invalid was no comparison to the doom of hell. Jesus is interested not merely in healing a person’s body. Far more important is the healing of his soul from sin.

2. The discourse (5:16–47).

5:16. **Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath.** In addition to the case of the invalid’s healing (5:1–15), John later recorded the cure of a blind man on the Sabbath (chap. 9). The grain-picking (Mark 2:23–28), the healing of a shriveled hand (Mark 3:1–5), curing a woman who had been crippled for 18 years (Luke 13:10–17), and healing a man with dropsy (Luke 14:1–6)—all these took place on the Sabbath. As seen in these passages, Jesus’ theology or philosophy of the Sabbath differed from that of His opponents. His opponents in the controversy were progressively humiliated while the crowds favored Him. The opponents’ response was to persecute Jesus by opposing Him and trying to kill Him (John 5:16, 18; 7:19, 25).

5:17. God rested on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2–3) from His work of Creation. But **Jesus pointed to the continuous work of God as a justification for His Sabbath activity.** God sustains the universe, begets life, and visits judgments. It is not wrong for His Son to do works of grace and mercy on the Sabbath. The words **My Father** should be noted. Jesus did not say “your Father” or even “our Father.” His opponents did not miss His claim to Deity.

5:18. **The Sabbath** controversy was enough to cause them to hate Jesus, but the implication of His claim that God is **His own Father** was impossible for them to accept. To them, God has no equals. Jesus’ claim, in their thinking, was a monstrous blasphemy. To be **equal with God** suggested, they thought, two gods and therefore polytheism. To make oneself “equal with God” was a claim of arrogant independence. In the Talmud four persons were branded as haughty because they made themselves equal to God: pagan rulers Hiram, Nebuchadnezzar, Pharaoh, and the Jewish King Joash.

White, J. E. (1998). *John*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (pp. 472-473). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Seeking Good Health (5:1–15)

After an unspecified period of time, Jesus traveled to Jerusalem for a “feast of the Jews.” The name of this feast is not mentioned, but it was probably one of the three pilgrimage feasts that Jewish males were expected to attend: Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles.

There Jesus passed by the Bethesda pool, where a number of invalids had placed themselves. The waters, when stirred, supposedly had miraculous powers of healing. A man who had been there for thirty-eight years was asked an interesting question by Jesus: “Do you want to get well?” Many depended on their condition for financial support given by healthy individuals out of pity. Another possible reason for this question relates to the man’s spirit; many who have experienced prolonged pain or misfortune have surrendered even the will to attempt to overcome their situation in life. When the invalid shared with Jesus his difficulty of getting into the pool for healing, Jesus proclaimed: “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” The man was instantly healed. This healing took place on a Sabbath. The Jews’ response was not joy over his healing but concern that he was violating the Sabbath by carrying his mat! The law of Moses did not forbid such a practice, only the Jewish interpretation of the law of Moses forbade it. Jesus found the healed man, and as with the Samaritan woman at the well, addressed the deeper condition of the man’s relationship with God. Jesus’ words are interesting: “Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” This injunction could be easily misinterpreted, either into a perspective that equates health with spiritual obedience or an idea that God bestows calamity upon the disobedient. For Jesus the consequences of sin are far more serious than any form of physical illness. He did not say that one can actually stop sinning but, in accord with the entire biblical witness, that believers should not purposefully live a life of sin.

Son of God (5:16–30)

John then informs his readers that because of this healing on the Sabbath, the Jews began to persecute Jesus. Legalism is a dreadful distortion of God’s will for those whom He created to live in fellowship with Him. Not outer deeds but inward postures matter to God. When the inner world is ordered around God’s dictates, then the outer world will exhibit utter holiness, a holiness defined by the life and ministry of Jesus. At this rebuke the Jews were outraged, not because Jesus was wrong (they didn’t answer His reply regarding healing on the Sabbath) but because “he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.” The Jews did not object to the idea of God as Father, but that Jesus somehow was in a special relationship to God as His Father, thus intimating that Jesus was equal with God.

Allen, J. P. (1972). John. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher’s Bible Commentary (pp. 671-672). Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Jesus Declares Himself (John 5:1–47)

The passage—John’s reference to another “feast of the Jews” (v. 1) calls attention to a major contribution by this Gospel. Without his help we likely could not figure the length of Christ’s ministry. He makes four references to feasts, and they all are probably Passovers. He states that three of them are (2:13; 6:4; 12:1).

If this one is taken to be a Passover also, then the work of Jesus is seen to be about three and one-half years. It again offers insight into John’s purpose. How swiftly he passed events by, wishing to spend most of his narrative on the last week! Three Passovers (two full years) are recorded in six chapters. Only seven episodes are told out of the labors of 24 months. Thus, carefully John chooses material to help men believe. In this section another sign of healing occurs. Out of it, Jesus for the first time makes a public declaration of who he is.

Special points—Jesus returned to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover, as he usually did. The sense of worship was strong in him. But he was also moved by mercy. Bethesda means “House of Mercy,” and Jesus went to a popular place in the city by that name. A multitude of invalids had been drawn there by the legend that there was healing in the bubbling spring waters. It is important to note that verse 4 appears in none of the early manuscripts. It is omitted in all later versions. John does not assert that the waters were stirred by an angel. He only suggests that popular belief.

One man, a cripple, was healed. Jesus did no mass healing, so he left the others as they were. He avoided appearing to be simply a miracle worker. He wanted his true nature to be seen, not merely to produce excitement.

This sign had a different element from the previous ones—it was public. The others included by John had been observed only by small groups. Likewise, it had two immediate effects. It demonstrated Jesus’ authority over chronic illness. Chiefly, in it he claimed to be Lord over the sabbath (v. 9).

Sooner or later this issue had to be faced, and now it was. Jesus could never agree with the harsh sabbath rules under which the people lived. But in order to manifest God’s real purpose in man and the sabbath, Jesus had to declare who he was. He knew it would cause open conflict. He would have to break with the rulers of the Jews. It would ultimately lead to his death.

So the amazing claim was made, “My Father is working still, and I am working” (v. 17, RSV). And the Jews did not miss the significance of that. He “called God his Father, making himself equal with God” (v. 18, RSV).

Now that the sign had led to Jesus’ bold claim, the rest of the chapter deals with John’s great themes—“life” and “witness.” In verses 21–29 Jesus told plainly how men have life only from the Father. There was testimony to the truth of that. There was the witness of John the Baptist in words (v. 32–35). Higher still was the witness of the Father through the signs of his Son (vv. 36–38, RSV).

Truth for today—It was a significant question Jesus asked of the lame man by the pool. “Do you want to be healed?” Do not too easily reply, “Well, of course he did.” He who had received alms and been carried on the backs of others for 38 years would have to go to work. Was he ready for that?

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The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 5:1-18. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.