

Third Presbyterian Church
Midweek Bible Study
Miracle Series
Miracle Healing at the Pool of Bethesda
Lesson 1 - Comfortably Sick

John 5:1-15 (NIV)

¹ Some time 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. ⁴

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.

1. The legend of the healing power of the pool of Bethesda was a legend that people believed and in that believe they gathered with this false hope.
 - a. What are some false hope legends or traditions people believe today?
 - b. Why is it problematic for a Christian to be superstitious?
2. In order to answer Jesus' question of "Do you want to be made well," we must first acknowledge that we are broken.
3. Comfortably Sick is an emotional prison we create for ourselves where thought of being free is impossible but we find comfort in our pain, comfort in our grudges, comfort in our past, comfort in our brokenness.
 - a. What are some pools of Bethesda people find themselves comfortably sick residing?
 - b. Why is it so difficult for some to believe that their present situation is not the ultimate plan God has for their life?
4. People do what they want to do and make excuses for what they don't want to do?
 - a. Why do people make so many excuses?
 - b. What can we do to stop making so many excuses?
5. The sermon gave some characteristics of a Perpetual Victim, what are they?
 - a. How can minister to someone who is a perpetual victim?
6. When Jesus tells the person to pick up his mat and walk, he was telling the man to make no provision to return to this comfortably sick existence by the pool, to be delivered from this place.
 - a. What does it mean to you to make no provision to go back to a place Jesus has delivered you? Give examples if possible.
7. After his miraculous healing, the next time Jesus encountered the man, he was in the temple.
 - a. Explain why this is so significant.
8. In what way has Jesus made you well?
9. Share your main takeaway from the sermon and the lesson?

The Essential Authority: Power to Meet the World's Desperate Needs, 5:1-16

DIVISION OVERVIEW: Jesus, Authority: John 5 reveals Jesus to be the Authority over all of life. He is due the same worship, obedience, and service as God; for He is equal with God (John 5:17-18). As God possesses life within Himself, so Jesus possesses life within Himself (John 5:26). As God has authority over all of life, so Jesus has authority over all of life.

In revealing His authority, Jesus first demonstrated the truth of His authority. He healed a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years—and He healed him on the Sabbath. Both acts pictured the truth of His authority. The healing of the man showed His authority over the physical world, and the breaking of the Jewish Sabbath law showed His authority to determine the rules of worship. After demonstrating the truth of His equality with God, He then began to teach the truth. This procedure, first demonstrating some truth and then teaching it, was to be followed time and again as Jesus revealed who He was throughout the Gospel of John. (See John 6; John 8.)

(5:1-16) Introduction— Sabbath: through this healing miracle, Jesus was claiming to have supreme authority over the Sabbath (see Deeper Study #1, Sabbath—Matthew 12:1; cp. John 5:9-10, 16, 18). However, there are also other striking lessons: the Lord's compassion (John 5:6-9), the problem of formal religion (John 5:10-12), and the charge to a converted man (John 5:13-14).

1. Jesus attended a Jewish feast in Jerusalem (v.1).
2. Scene 1: the diseased and the ill—a picture of the world's desperate need (v.2-4).
3. Scene 2: Jesus and the man—a picture of Jesus' power to meet the world's need (v.5-9).
4. Scene 3: the religionists and the man—a picture of dead religion trying to meet the world's need (v.10-12).
5. Scene 4: Jesus and the man after healing—a picture of the believer's responsibility (v.13-14).
6. Scene 5: the religionists against Jesus—a picture of the world rejecting God's Savior (v.15-16).

1. (5:1) Feasts— Jesus Christ, Worship of God: Jesus attended a Jewish feast in Jerusalem. The feast is not named, but it was probably one of the three Feasts of Obligation: the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, or Pentecost. These were called Feasts of Obligations because every male Jew who lived within twenty miles of Jerusalem was required by law to attend them. It is significant that Jesus was seen attending the feast.

1. It gave Him an opportunity to reach a large number of people. Most of the people who attended the feast would be God-fearing people and have their minds upon God; therefore, they would be more prepared for the gospel.

2. It gave Him an opportunity to teach people to be faithful to the worship of God. He, the Son of God Himself, was faithful.

Thought 1. All persons should be faithful in their worship of God.

2. (5:2-4) Needy, The: the first scene was that of the diseased and the ill. These—the diseased and the ill—picture those in the world who are gripped by desperate need. The setting is a pool by a sheep market. The word *market* is supplied by the translator; it is not in the Greek text. It may have been a sheep market or sheep gate or sheep stall where the animals were kept. Whatever it was, there was a pool to provide water for the animals to drink and five porches to provide a resting area for the comfort of the people. The pool and a "great multitude of impotent folk" lying around the pool were the focus of attention. Note two points.

1. Their need—which is a picture of all in the world who live in desperate need.
 - ⇒ There were the blind who could not see.
 - ⇒ There were the lame who could not walk.
 - ⇒ There were the withered who were deformed and paralyzed.
 - ⇒ There were so many who were poor and beggarly.

Thought 1. So many in the world are blind, lame and withered spiritually.

"My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul" (Job 10:1).

"For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed" (Psalm 31:10).

2. Their desperate hope and faith. Either the description given in Scripture is to be taken literally, or else men of that day gave their explanation as to what caused the pool to be *troubled*. If this account is man's description of what happened at the pool, then there was apparently a subterranean pocket of energy, either air or a stream underneath the pool that caused the pool to occasionally bubble up. The people of that day, grasping for something to help them in their daily lives, said that a supernatural occurrence was happening when the water bubbled. An angel was thought to be swimming around in the water. The first person to move into the water after the bubbling was believed to be healed.

Thought 1. Men are always grasping for something to help them in their daily lives. It may be some *supernatural or destined power* in a pool of water or in the astrology of stars above or in some magical person on earth. Men never change, regardless of the generation. In their grasp for help in life, they continue to seek everywhere except in Christ, the Son of God Himself. They hope and put their faith in everything except Him.

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

3. (5:5-9) Jesus Christ, Compassion— Power— Healing— Faith— Obedience: the second scene was that of Jesus and the man. This is a picture of Jesus, who has the power to meet the needs of the desperate in the world. The outline of this point is adequate to see what happened.

1. The man's plight. He was either paralyzed or lame; he had been that way for thirty-eight *long* years.

2. Jesus' *compassion*: it was heart-warming, touching, and revealing—demonstrating how He wants to reach out to every person. He *saw* the man lying there, and *knew* all about his desperate condition. Note the striking point: it was Jesus who initiated the relationship, approaching the man and reaching out to help Him.

Thought 1. Jesus *sees* and *knows* every man's condition. He reaches out to every man in compassion, offering help. He reaches out through...

- the message of the Word.
- the witness of family or friend.
- the beauty of nature.
- the thoughts about God that penetrate every man's mind.

"Who shall separate us from the love [compassion] of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Romans 8:35).

"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

3. The man's helplessness. He was all alone in this world, having no family or friend who could help him.

4. The Lord's power. This is a significant point: the man did not know he was healed *until he obeyed* the command of the Lord. Jesus did not pronounce a "word of healing"; He merely commanded the man to act. In the act the man was to show his faith. *If he believed*, he would arise and walk; *if he did not believe*, he would simply continue to lie there and continue on just as he had always done. (See Deeper Study #2—John.)

Thought 1. No man has to continue on and on through life just as he has always been, enslaved to the sin and corruption and desperate needs of the world. He can experience the healing power of Jesus Christ, the power to change his life and make him into a new man. All he has to do is one simple thing: believe the Word of Jesus Christ enough to obey, doing exactly what Jesus says. It is a clear fact: if we believe Him, we obey Him; if we do not believe Him, we do not obey Him. To be made whole and changed into a new man—a new man who is freed from the sin and desperate needs of this corruptible world—we have to believe Him enough to obey Him. (See note—John 4:50 for more verses of Scripture.)

"For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

"And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed" (Luke 17:14).

"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Hebrews 5:9).

"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:17).

5. The sinister problem: Jesus had healed the man on the Sabbath. By healing the man on the Sabbath, Jesus was breaking the Jewish ceremonial law; He was committing a serious sin, violating a ritual and rule of religion. The rest of the man's story centers upon this fact.

4. (5:10-12) Religion: the third scene was that of the religionists and the man. This is a picture of dead religion trying to meet the world's desperate need. Note three things.

1. Dead religion is a religion of legalism. The religionists were trying to meet the needs of people through rules and regulations, ceremony and rituals. (See Deeper Study #1—Luke 6:2; Deeper Study #2—John 5:15-16.) They were more concerned with the man who was violating the ritual of the Sabbath than with the man who was suffering in a pitiful condition.

2. Dead religion is a religion ignorant of true authority. They should have known that the power of God had healed the man, and should have been eager to share with the man Jesus, the man upon whom such power rested. But note: they cared little about the power of God and His messenger. They cared only that the status quo be maintained, that their religious practices continue as they were and not be violated. Their thoughts were upon their own religious position and security. (See Deeper Study #2—John 5:15-16 for discussion.)

3. Dead religion is a religion blind to love and good. Note the question of the religionists. It was not, "Who is the man who has healed and helped you so much?" but, "Who is the man that broke the religious law?" They did not see the good that had been done. They saw only that their position and security was threatened and that someone had more power and influence and was doing more good than they were.

Thought 1. How many true messengers of God are criticized by powerless religionists, criticized because they do things differently or do more good than others? Men fear the loss of their position and security, fear that people may begin to wonder about their lack of true power—power that honestly helps men.

"But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day" (Matthew 12:7-8).

"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:39).

"And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition" (Mark 7:9).

"Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10).

5. (5:13-14) Follow-up—Maturity—Growth: the fourth scene was that of Jesus and the man after healing. This is a picture of the believer's responsibility. Note that Jesus had left the man right after healing him because of the large crowd on the porches. For some unstated reason, Jesus did not want to attract a crowd at this time. The point is striking: Jesus sought the man out again! Remember, Jesus had reached out to save the man; now He was reaching out for another purpose. When He found the man, a picture of the believer's responsibility was painted.

1. There was the duty to worship. The man was found in the temple worshipping and giving thanks to God.

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25).

"Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (1 Chron. 16:29).

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (Psalm 23:6).

2. There was the duty to remember his healing, his salvation. The moment should never be forgotten or lost (cp. 2 Peter 1:9).

"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12).

"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephes. 5:20).

"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thes. 5:18).

"Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons" (Deut. 4:9).

3. There was the duty to sin no more. Apparently the man had been lame or paralyzed because of some accident caused by sin. Jesus cautioned the man: "Sin no more."

Thought 1. How many are physically crippled or diseased because of some sin? Many suffer *crippling accidents and diseases* because of sin such as drunkenness, immorality, or driving over the speed limit.

"She said, No man, Lord. and Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11).

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Romans 6:12).

"Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame" (1 Cor. 15:34).

"Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil" (Isaiah 1:16).

4. There was the duty to fear the judgment. Jesus warned the man that if he did not repent and turn from his sin, he would face a more terrible judgment than his crippling paralysis.

6. (5:15-16) Jesus Christ, Rejection: the fifth scene was that of the religionists and Jesus. This is a picture of the world rejecting God's Savior. Note two things.

1. The man told the religionists who had healed him. He did not do this to bring harm to Jesus. He thought the religionists should know and would want to benefit from knowing Jesus personally.

2. The reason the religionists opposed Jesus needs to be studied closely (see note—John 5:17-18 for discussion).

DEEPER STUDY #1

(5:10) **Jews:** the Jews (*Ioudaio*) are spoken of some seventy times in the Gospels. They are always spoken of as the opposition to Jesus Christ—as those who set themselves against Him. They include some Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, priests, and secular leaders. They were the religionists and leaders who personally refused to believe Jesus Christ. They rejected both His claim to be the Son of God and His offer of salvation and eternal life (cp. John 1:10-11, 19. See Subject Index.)

DEEPER STUDY #2

(5:15-16) **Religionists— Rules and Regulations— Jesus Christ, Opposed:** breaking the Sabbath law was a serious matter to the Jew. Just how serious can be seen in the strict demands governing the Sabbath. Law after law was written to govern all activity on the Sabbath. A person could not travel, fast, cook, buy, sell, draw water, walk beyond a certain distance, lift anything, fight in a war, or heal on the Sabbath unless life was at stake. A person was not to contemplate any kind of work or activity. A good example of the legal restriction and the people's loyalty to it is seen in the women who witnessed Jesus' crucifixion. They would not even walk to His tomb to prepare the body for burial until the Sabbath was over (Mark 16:1f; Matthew 28:1f).

It was a serious matter to break the Sabbath law. A person was condemned, and if the offense was serious enough, the person was to die.

The leaders' conflict with Jesus over religious beliefs and rules is sometimes thought by modern man to be petty and harsh, or else such conflicts are just not understood. Three facts will help in understanding why the conflicts happened and were life-threatening, ending in the murder of Jesus Christ.

1. The Jewish nation had been held together by their religious beliefs. Through the centuries the Jewish people had been conquered by army after army, and by the millions they had been deported and scattered over the world. Even in the day of Jesus they were enslaved by Rome. Their religion was the *binding force* that kept Jews together, in particular...

- their belief that God had called them to be a distinctive people (who worshipped the only true and living God).
- their rules governing the Sabbath and the temple.
- their laws governing intermarriage, worship, and cleansing.
- their rules governing what foods they could and could not eat.

Their religious beliefs and rules protected them from alien beliefs and from being swallowed up by other nationalities through intermarriage. Their religion was what maintained their distinctiveness as a people and as a nation. Jewish leaders knew this. They knew that *their religion was the binding force* that held their nation together. They therefore opposed anyone or anything that threatened or attempted to break the laws of their religion and nation.

2. Many of the religionists were men of deep, deep conviction, strong in their beliefs. Therefore, they became steeped in religious belief and practice, law and custom, tradition and ritual, ceremony and liturgy, rules and regulations. To break any law or rule governing any belief or practice was a serious offense, for it taught loose behavior. And loose behavior, once it had spread enough, would weaken their religion. Therefore, in their minds Jesus was committing a terrible offense by breaking their law. He was weakening their religion and threatening their nation.

3. The religionists were men who had profession, position, recognition, esteem, livelihood, and security. Anyone who went contrary to what they believed and taught was a threat to all they had. Some religionists undoubtedly felt that Jesus was a threat to them. Every time Jesus broke their law, they felt He was undermining their very position and security.

The error of the religionists was fourfold.

1. They misinterpreted and corrupted God's Word
3. They rejected God's way of righteousness, God's Messiah, who is Jesus Christ

4. They allowed religion in its tradition and ritual, ceremony and rules to become more important than meeting the basic needs of human life: the need for God and the need for spiritual, mental, and physical health. Being the true Messiah, Jesus was bound to expose such error. Therefore, the battle lines were drawn.

The Messiah had to liberate people from such enslaving behavior. He had to liberate them so they could be saved and worship God in freedom of spirit.

The religionists had to oppose anyone who broke their law. They had to oppose Jesus because He was a threat to their nation and to their own personal position and security.

The religionists' attack took two forms.

1. First, they tried to discredit Jesus so the multitudes would stop following Him (cp. Matthew 21:46).

"And they asked him, saying; Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days? that they might accuse Him" (Matthew 12:10).

"And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him" (Luke 6:7).

"Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" (Matthew 22:15-17).

2. Second, failing to discredit Jesus, they sought some way to kill Him.

"The Pharisees went out, and held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him" (Matthew 12:14; cp. Matthew 26:3-4).

"And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him: for they feared the people" (Luke 22:2).

"Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18; cp. John 7:1; John 7:19-20, 25).