

Series: Signs	Reference: John 5:1-17	Title: The Third	Date: 03.12.23
Website Writeup:			
<p>Today we continue our study of the signs of Jesus. According to John a sign is a visible experience of God working through Jesus in the world for our salvation. The healing of the invalid in this story shows that God seeks out the lost to save them - that's the work of God. He'll accomplish His mission regardless of what we say, think, or do.</p>			

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Today we continue our study of the signs of Jesus. According to John a sign is a visible experience of God working through Jesus in the world for our salvation. Let's turn in our pew Bibles to p727 to read John 5:1-17 in segments, so keep it open on your laps. The healing of the invalid in this story reveals, God seeks out the lost to save them - that's the work of God. He'll accomplish His mission regardless of what we say, think, or do.

It starts...Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. ²Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³Here a great number of disabled people used to lie - the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.

Stop there a moment. The pool at Bethesda along with the pool of Siloam were believed to be Mikveh's - jewish ritual baths for purification. The Siloam Pool was discovered in 2005, and was quickly identified with the pool mentioned in John. The Bethesda Pool was excavated in 1888, but it took more than 100 years for archaeologists to accurately identify & interpret the site.¹

Some translations include an additional statement on v3, and then an additional v4, usually in parenthesis, which read....*"waiting for the moving of the waters; ⁴for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted."*

Earliest manuscripts don't contain these, so some leave it out or identify it with parenthesis. However, they only give a glimpse into the background of the belief surrounding this pool, leaving the verses out makes no difference in meaning. But the detail, whether we read in parenthesis, or found out from historians, does help us understand the story.

It continues in v5...*⁵One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶When 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?"*

Stopping there a moment, 38 years! We don't know what caused this, but he had apparently been coming here a long time in the hope of being healed. This is where sick

¹ <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/jerusalem/the-bethesda-pool-site-of-one-of-jesus-miracles/>

people went to get well, they sit next to this pool, and if possible, jump in when the waters are stirred. That shows great determination to be healed by this man.

So, why the question...‘Do you want to get well?’ It’s like asking a cancer patient, “Do you want your cancer gone?” But think about how complex & irrational we can be. How emotionally tied to an illness, infirmity, or suffering a person can become.

In the novel *An Earthly Crown*, an ambassador, visits a nomadic nation. But he comes from a nation which practices slavery; the nomads are utterly opposed. The ambassador brings a slave named Samae with him. When the nomads learn this, they demand that he free her or die. The ambassador sets her free, but then to the astonishment of everyone, Samae refuses to accept her freedom. They conclude that she’s been a slave too long to understand what freedom means.²

We see this in people with Stockholm Syndrome, where people develop positive feelings toward their captors or abusers over time. Patty Hearst used this defense in the 1970’s when she helped her kidnappers rob multiple banks. She claimed she’d been brainwashed & temporarily became an advocate for her captors’ radical ideology.

We’ve all met someone to where their infirmity or suffering has become their identity. You can ask that person if they want to get well, they may say yes, but do they really? Maybe they wouldn’t know what to do with the freedom wellness would bring. Sometimes a persons whole being becomes reordered developing coping mechanisms so deeply engrained that they wouldn’t know what to do with good health. Since their illness has affected everything. For instance, maybe they’ve lived off the State, or maybe they only know how to manipulate the feelings of others to have any human contact because they’re simply difficult to be around. If they get ‘well’ they’ll have new responsibilities & all the former mechanisms they’ve built up to survive are gone. They’d now have to work & develop healthy relationships of give & take.

Jesus asked this question not just to see the man walk again, but in the spirit of wholeness given he’s obviously seeking physical healing, but Jesus will also address sin in his life later - does he truly want to be fully restored, body, mind & soul? It continues...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.”*

Jesus probably sensed in this man a real desire to see his life restored but he’s powerless on his own. A person who would be grateful & productive when healing comes. Someone who truly wanted wholeness, because in v8 Jesus didn’t hesitate. It says...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.*

In our first sermon of this series when Christ changed water to wine, I said Jesus’ mind was on the greater picture looking to His future act of atonement, due to the wording He

² (Kate Elliott, *An Earthly Crown* [New York: Daw Books, 1991])

used in response to His mother, and the imagery of the ceremonial purification jars & wine, and what those meant. I can imagine when Jesus sees sickness & infirmity He *also* has His mind on the larger picture. Since brokenness isn't a part of the original created order. **The Bible can be broken down into 4 segments. What it was like (the Garden of Eden). What happened (the Fall). What it's like now (in Christ the kingdom has come, but not fully come), and what it will be (the future restoration of all things). A kingdom of healing & wholeness where every tear is wiped away! This is what Jesus works towards, salvation & wholeness on all levels!**

I imagine Jesus pleased & the guy overjoyed in this moment, grateful to be made whole again! Jesus is setting things as they should be. And we see, we must desire healing & wholeness in Christ. If there were a soundtrack to this event it would be a rising symphony lifting our spirits high until, in the next verse, the needle gets dragged across the album when it says... *The day on which this took place was a Sabbath,¹⁰ and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."*

You can see everyone fall silent, and think, "Really, 38 years, and all you care about is him carrying the mat!?" It's as if they want the guy to say, "I'm sorry, I let my joy get the better of me, I've come to my senses now. I'll stop this silly celebration."

So, what's the big deal?

Well...this happened as it says on the Sabbath. And, let's be fair to the Jewish leaders, there were certain things which originated from the Scriptures which were not allowed. Although we know that in the noble desire to adhere to these, the Jewish leadership put a great hedge around the law, sort of as a safety barrier. For instance, if the Scriptures said don't do X they would set barriers so many layers deep in order not to even come close to doing X. Admirable, but it became legalistic as these things do.

This is still alive among orthodox Jews today. As a matter of fact, there are thirty-nine categories of ritual work forbidden on the Sabbath which began with the story of the manna in Exodus, and also are intimately linked to the tasks performed to build the Tabernacle in the Old Testament. Each one is broken down in detail for the modern Jew to practice the Sabbath well.

These are the 39 categories: Carrying | Burning | Extinguishing | Finishing | Writing | Erasing | Cooking | Washing | Sewing | Tearing | Knotting | Untying | Shaping | Plowing | Planting | Reaping | Harvesting | Threshing | Winnowing | Selecting | Sifting | Grinding | Kneading | Combing | Spinning | Dyeing | Chain-stitching | Warping | Weaving | Unraveling | Building | Demolishing | Trapping | Shearing | Slaughtering | Skinning | Tanning | Smoothing | Marking³

³ The book "SABBATH Day of Eternity" by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (available separately, or included in the "The Aryeh Kaplan Anthology II," published by the NCSY (National Conference of Synagogue Youth) Division of the Orthodox Union.

When we moved into our house I had to reprogram the oven and the refrigerator not to go into Sabbath mode on Saturdays since we had bought from a Jewish family. That's because, part of the work to build the Tabernacle was to build fires, and the Rabbi's concluded that Jews cannot complete an electrical circuit on the Sabbath since that is akin to making a fire, let alone turn the burner on. Therefore, many will use timers on their lights on the Sabbath, since they're not allowed to turn a light switch on or off.

One of the problems modern life brings in places like Miami where there are a lot of Jews who live on higher floors in apartment buildings is the elevator. There are two problems with it. Firstly, if you push a button for your floor, you're completing an electrical circuit. Secondly, if the infrared eye on the elevator door detects that you are in the way & reopens, you've completed a circuit. The solution is, many apartment buildings & hotels will provide a Sabbath elevator which is running constantly from the bottom to the top stopping at every single floor so you don't have to push the button. And it's posted, you have exactly 6 seconds from when the doors open to get in or out in order not to trigger the doors to reopen.

Notice the 1st category is carrying things, specifically in a public place & the first thing to be prohibited. *The initial commandment of the Sabbath was given in connection with the Manna; when Moses told the people (Ex. 16:29), "See, the Lord has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day."* He was telling them they could not carry the Manna. The Torah also gives an account of a man who was put to death for gathering & carrying wood on the Sabbath.

The Prophet Jeremiah specifically warns people not to carry on the Sabbath in order to keep the day holy. (*Jeremiah 17:21-22*), *"Thus says the Lord, "Take heed for yourselves, and do not carry any load on the sabbath day or bring anything in through the gates of Jerusalem. 22You shall not bring a load out of your houses on the sabbath day nor do any work, but keep the sabbath day holy, as I commanded your forefathers."*

Carrying is the 1st & the prototype of all other types of Sabbath work. The deeper meaning was to forbid any act where man demonstrates his mastery over nature. But the first act by which man demonstrates such mastery is by taking things from nature & carrying them where he needs them. Therefore, if we're to relinquish our mastery over nature, the first requirement is that we not carry anything away.

In a sense, by not carrying, we also relinquish our ownership of everything in the world. A main sign of ownership is that one may take something wherever he pleases. On the Sabbath, we give up something of this ownership. Nothing may be removed from the house. When a man leaves his house, he may carry nothing but the clothing on his back, because it's God, not man, who owns all things.

To this day this category absolutely forbids all carrying in the street, pocketbooks, purses, wallets & keys all may not be carried. The only thing one may carry outdoors are things that are actually worn.

We can get some idea how serious carrying on the Sabbath is from the following law. When Rosh Hashanah falls on the Sabbath, the Shofar is not sounded. This was legislated by the Sanhedrin for a certain reason. Suppose that a synagogue has only one Shofar, and it became lost or damaged. Imagine the embarrassment & breach of ceremony involved in not being able to sound the Shofar on this most solemn day of Rosh Hashanah. How great the temptation to carry a replacement Shofar from another synagogue, or someone's home! To avoid this problem the Sanhedrin decreed that the Shofar never be sounded on the Sabbath at all.

This is why we must be fair to the religious leaders of Jesus day. Carrying something would be viewed as an absolutely prideful & arrogant act, flaunting God's absolute authority & ownership of all things. It was rooted in Scripture. So, to us what seems trivial, is to them deathly serious. But we must add, all Sabbath rules can be broken if it pertains to saving a life. For instance, under the category of burning, one isn't allowed to create a flame, or extinguish one either, but if the house catches fire you can use a phone & call the fire department to save a life.

This is important in this story, since this man has not only had his ability to walk restored, but has experienced the grace of God on his life making him whole once again.

It continues...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 Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.* ¹⁶*So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him.* ¹⁷*In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working."*

The healing of the invalid shows that God seeks out the lost to save them - that is the work of God & He will accomplish His mission regardless of what we say, think, or do. The work of God is about restoring us to what we were originally created to be! Whole, healthy, and connected to our Creator. Therefore, this does not fall under the Jewish leaders authority since this is about restoring life & salvation to people!

Jesus asks this man if he'd like to be well (v. 6). An odd question. If he's been lying there thirty-eight years, specifically for healing, you'd think the answer would be "Yes!" However, the man's answer seems to indicate that Jesus was onto something. Instead of saying "Yes," he says, "I can't. No one will help me" (see v. 7). There is a lesson there: when we have been suffering for so long, it is possible that our identity can become wrapped up in that suffering, to the point that we can't conceive of another reality. If that applies to you, please realize that you are more than the suffering you're going through. You have a greater identity & purpose.

Jesus responds to this man with a surprising response of his own: “Get up...” (v. 8). Jesus heals him! Who is seeking out whom in this story? Does the invalid go looking for Jesus? No. Did he even know who Jesus was? No! We can say that with confidence from verses 11–17. There’s proof here of God’s love described in John 3:17...*For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.* a God who has sent his Son to the world to save it - not because the world was seeking God. The world did not even know him as John 1:10 tells us...*He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.* God did it because “God is love.” Here also is proof that God’s grace is not an exchange, where we do something & God then responds. This man didn’t say he wanted to be healed. His response to Jesus’s question was, “I can’t.” This man can’t even tell people who healed him. God did this because that is just who God is.

So the man picks up his mat & leaves. After this act, the man has a confrontation with the religious authorities because he is carrying his mat on the Sabbath, and they deem this action to be work (5:10). Jesus then encounters the man again and tells him to “sin no more” (v. 14), showing Jesus cares about both the physical & spiritual (vv. 14–15) - the whole person. Jesus heals the man physically & restores to him a life the majority of people take for granted. Then he seeks him out a second time & encourages him to live that life in accordance with God’s will. God cares deeply about the whole person: He cares about you if you’re ill, and cares about you if your soul is sick with sin.

The sign here is that God is at work in the world through Jesus, and that work is to seek out the broken & restore them to life, to seek out the lost & make sure they are found & know Jesus’s name (v. 15). In doing so, Jesus is merely doing the work of His Father (v. 19). He will carry out this will in the lives of whosoever He chooses (v. 21). In light of verse 7 where the man reveals his need, verse 21 is perhaps the most astonishing aspect of this sign. It says...*For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.* God will accomplish His mission regardless of what we say, think, or do. Jesus is unstoppable. Not even death can contain Him.

When Jesus came to this man & asked him, “Do you want to be well?” it wasn’t an unreasonable question. But the man’s inability to give a direct answer did not stop Jesus from setting him free. God has the power to change stony complicated hearts & bring life.

Do you want to be well? Have you been a slave too long to know what freedom means? Maybe you’re sick, or suffering from an addiction, or just nagging negative thoughts about yourself. Let’s take a few minutes to give the Holy Spirit time to address these, whatever they may be...I’ll open us, then you can silently pray on your own. But if you would like prayer for anything specific, take the risk right now to raise your hand & leave it raised until someone joins you. If you are near someone with their hand raised, and feel comfortable doing so, please offer to pray for them. If you feel the Spirit is compelling you to pray for someone specific in this room, please go to them during this time & ask their permission to pray for them.