

John 5:1-18

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- [0 : 00] May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.
- Amen. Well, it's quite a well-known story, I think. It is, I think, the third of the signs in John's Gospel, although it's not, there's nothing that says, this is sign number three.
- We're told which is sign number one and sign number two, and I think this is sign number three. And it is a sign that John gives us of who Jesus is.
- And I'm going to talk about it under four headings. It contains a great miracle, a great claim, a great question, and a great challenge.
- And on the piece of paper you've got with those headings, you'll find four, there are four times in the passage in which Jesus speaks, and each of those I have attached to my four headings.
- [1 : 10] Or maybe I built my four headings around what Jesus said. That would be better, wouldn't it? So let's first think about the great miracle. It's described with quite a lot of geographical detail.
- If you look at the commentaries, they go on for ages about what the place was actually called. But I don't think I'm going to do that tonight. There was a pair of pools, apparently, with five colonnades, which were described by a pilgrim from Bordeaux in 333 AD.
- And she came back saying, this is an exciting place, I've been to see it. Since then, these colonnades have been dug up in recent years, and they're in northeast Jerusalem, near Nehemiah's sheep gate.
- So that's exciting in the sense that we know where this miracle happened all those years ago. And there, by the sheep gate, by the pools with the five colonnades, there were sick people lying.
- And the aim of the sick people, who were lying by the pool, was to watch until the water was stirred up, and then it was believed that the first one into the water would be healed.
- [2 : 28] Come back to that in a moment. On the other hand, we seem to know quite a lot about where this took place, but we know relatively little about the invalid whom Jesus healed.
- We know that he couldn't walk. We know that he'd been an invalid for 38 years. Which, when I look around at the congregation, I guess most of you can't look back 38 years.
- So when he saw the water bubble, there was always someone with greater mobility than he had, who got there first. We don't know whether he was a paraplegic, or whether...
- But certainly he had mobility issues, we'd say nowadays. He also seems to have lacked friends. Nobody was there to help him get in the great rush for the pool.
- There wasn't someone else to drag him in and get him there first. It's also interesting, as we read the story about the healing at the pool, that Jesus doesn't heal all the sick at the pool.
- [3 : 34] He heals just this one, this person in special need. And I don't think that Jesus heals him because of his special niceness.

In fact, if I'm really honest, I don't think I warm to him particularly. I don't warm to him in the way that I warm to the man born blind in chapter 9, or the Samaritan woman in chapter 4.

I think it's one thing that puts me off him a little bit. It's difficult to decide his motive in verse 15, when the man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

When I was at school, we called someone who did that a sneak. I don't know whether people still use that word. Maybe he was just foolish and gave Jesus away to the leaders by mistake.

Anyway, back to the pool. The healing miracle is very straightforward. Jesus simply said, get up, pick up your mat, and walk.

[4 : 41] And he did just that. A couple of little details about that. Obviously, Jesus had the authority to make someone well instantly like that.

But he also had the authority that when he spoke, this chap who hadn't been able to use his legs for 38 years, got up. And it worked.

And he was well. And he was told to carry his mat. I guess he didn't have very many possessions. But being able to carry his mat perhaps showed the reality of the healing.

He was now strong enough both to walk. He wasn't just staggering along. He was a mat carrier. He was well. But as we read the story, what comes over almost most strongly is that this great miracle took place on the Sabbath.

So instead of the healing leading to an outpouring of exciting praise, everyone rushing around saying, Hallelujah! The man's healed. We have something exciting happening in our midst.

[5 : 49] We have the presence of God with us. The leaders said, there's a chap carrying his mat on the Sabbath. It wasn't that they objected to a healing on the Sabbath.

That was okay. Although they didn't show any enthusiasm for it. It was the fact that there was a man carrying his mat. Now, given that mat carrying wasn't the man's business, he wasn't a mat carrier, it's not clear to me that in terms of the Old Testament law, he was actually breaking it in any case.

But he was certainly transgressing the tradition of the elders and contravening one of the 39 prohibited categories of work. We're going to reread the conversation in verses 10b to 12.

The Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, it's the Sabbath. The law forbids you to carry your mat. But he replied, the man who made me well said to me, pick up your mat and walk.

So they asked him, who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk? Do you note how the healed man, the invalid, who's now the healed man, calls Jesus, the man who made me well.

[7 : 10] An exciting description. Whereas the Jewish leaders call him, this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk. They don't even acknowledge that he is the healer. I wonder in a way, if it was maybe Jesus' kindness that made him tell him, the invalid, to carry his mat.

I mean, the man had very few possessions, presumably. The mat was one of the few that he did have. And by telling him to carry it, I mean, if he'd left it behind, it might have got stolen. If he'd just picked it up, then he'd been criticized.

But by telling him to carry the mat, it meant that he was able to pass the blame for mat carrying onto Jesus. Then the scene shifts to the temple.

We see the healed man at the temple. I presume he'd gone to the temple to give thanks for this exciting thing that had happened in his life, that he was now able to walk.

And Jesus finds him at the temple. And says the challenging words in verse 14, which I'm going to look at later. See you are well again.

[8 : 20] Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. And then in verse 17, my passage goes on to the end of verse 18. Jesus said to them, my father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.

It's a double claim, isn't it? In verse 17. First, he calls God my father.

Now we often call God our father. When we pray, that's the way that Jesus taught us to pray. And rightly so. We can say that God is my father.

That's okay. It's fine. It's the right thing to do as a believer, as a Christian. But Jesus is making a different claim, a more powerful claim. He's not claiming that to be a child by adoption.

He's claiming to be in a very special relationship with him. That God is his father in the fullest sense. And I'm not going to explore that tonight, because I think the rest of the chapter explores that in detail.

[9 : 38] And I'm going to leave that to others. What is more, Jesus is explaining who he is by the way in which he is working on the Sabbath.

He's saying, my father is always at his work to this very day. The father works on the Sabbath. And Jesus says, I like him.

I'm working on the Sabbath. Now, this is quite complicated. But on the one hand, God rested on the seventh day. That's why there's a Sabbath at all.

Because he'd finished the work of creation. But the fact that God had finished the work of creation didn't mean that God had become inactive. I mean, God never goes off duty.

He never closes down. He never sleeps. He's always there to answer our prayers. And Jesus says that because he is God, he too is at work, even on the Sabbath.

[10 : 46] In this morning's reading from Hebrews, we heard how Jesus sustains all things by his powerful word. That happens on the Sabbath like it happens on every day of the week.

God is at work on the Sabbath. Jesus is at work on the Sabbath. In our reading, Jesus' work of healing was a mercy which imitated the gracious Sabbath work of God.

Now, many people see there as being seven signs in John or possibly six plus Jesus' resurrection. And some see those signs as being days of new creation.

That's why there's six or seven of them depending on how you look at it. On this basis, Tom Wright sees that with Jesus' coming, we have moved into a new time scale, a new time zone in which God is healing our sick, sorry world.

The problem is that the Jewish leaders are still in the old time zone. They've not noticed the change. They haven't adjusted their watches and understood what's happening with Jesus' presence among us.

[12 : 10] Exactly how we handle the Sabbath is complicated. But as far as the passage is concerned, it's entirely clear. We see a great miracle. The invalid walks.

A great claim that Jesus is the Son of God. And my third thing I want to look at is we have a great question. In verse six, it says, Jesus says, do you want to get well?

Well, I guess that for the invalid, the answer was pretty obvious. He'd waited 38 years to be in a better situation.

He'd struggled with not many friends, no one to get him into the pool, a miserable existence in many ways. But maybe he had become accustomed to his place at the pool, playing dominoes with the other invalids.

Maybe he was used to that life. Jesus was offering the opportunity to change. Did he want the opportunity for change? But this story isn't just a true account of what happened one Sabbath by the pool, but also a picture of what Jesus offers to do for us.

[13 : 31] Only one invalid was healed, but Jesus offers new life to each of us, healing of relationships with God and with one another. When Jesus spoke, the invalid immediately obeyed his command, got up and walked.

And that authority, that authoritative command, overcame his helplessness, his 38 years unable to walk. Jesus set him free from the despair that we can hear in his voice.

I can't get there because someone else gets there first. His poor self-image. I've got no one to help me.

Someone always beats me. Jesus sets him free. Tonight, you have the chance to stay on for Christianity Explored to find out more about the call of God, what it is, how to respond, how by believing we may have life in Jesus' name.

For the connection between the story of the invalid and our lives becomes clearer in the fourth and final section, the fourth and final time that Jesus speaks in the passage.

[15 : 03] In verse 14. See, you are well again, he says. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. Again, the commentaries get quite excited and spend quite a lot of time on this one.

I mean, illness is certainly not always the result of individual sin. that's very clear and very important to say that. Jesus makes that very clear to the blind man in chapter 9.

His blindness was not his own fault and it was not the fault of his parents. Illness can, of course, be our fault. Certain lifestyles or behavior lead to illness.

Without discussing that question in too much detail, what Jesus is definitely saying is that the consequences of sin are even worse than the results of bad health.

Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. It's more important to be forgiven than to be healed. It's vital to let Jesus bring us out of helplessness into a relationship with God.

[16 : 23] the word that Jesus used to the invalid was get up. It's the same word that he uses in verse 21 for raising the dead.

that's the really important thing to respond to Jesus to accept his forgiveness through his death on the cross for us.

But I guess there's a further challenge that we ought to hear this evening or some of us should. I guess when I read the passage one of the things that strikes me is the very poor behavior of the religious leaders.

They see God at work and without denying the healing say that God can't be at work on other grounds. Is there any danger that I might do that?

Reminds me in a way of the story of the prodigal son. There are two people who've gone astray. the younger brother and the elder brother. The danger for some of us is that we're more like the elder brother than the younger brother.

[17 : 42] So this story may challenge us whether we're lying by the pool helplessly called to respond to Jesus to get well or whether we're authorities in the temple denying God's work.

Let's pray as we sit. Heavenly Father thank you for the excitement of the story we've read tonight.

Thank you Lord Jesus that you heal. Thank you that you healed that man all those years ago. Thank you that today you save us you call us to get up and follow you and that you've given made that possible through your death on the cross.

You've made a way by which we can do that. And so tonight we come to you and we come in thankfulness and we pray for the Christianity explored event that will happen after this one.

Thank you Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.