

John on Jesus - Healing at the Bethesda Community Pool

Sign Title: Healing at the Bethesda Community Pool

August 26, 2012

Good morning Faith Church. For those of you who are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. We are studying our way through the Gospel of John, and this morning we begin chapter five.

As we pick up in the fifth chapter, we thematically turn a page in the book. We are moving from Jesus' introduction to the world, to the beginning of a conflict that will ultimately lead to his crucifixion. The conflict between Jesus and the Jews about Jesus' identity will ultimately lead to crucifying him. That is later in our story. This morning, the conflict begins. Let's put our finger in the text at chapter 5.

Pools of pitiful people

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. John 5:1–4 (ESV)

Last week Jesus completed the journey to his hometown after the first of three Passovers in his ministry. This week, we see Jesus back in Jerusalem celebrating one of many Jewish holidays.

In Jerusalem, by the Sheep Gate, was a public pool with five roofed colonnades. Let me explain this. There is a fair amount of historical discrepancy on the location of these pools. The best archaeology of the last hundred years is reasonably certain of their



location. They were twin pools that were partially spring fed. They had colonnades around them. Colonnades are walkways with columns on each side which support a roof. That way you have the sun off your head but can enjoy the cool of the breeze while you are enjoy the beauty of the water. The way this was built was there were two pools surrounded by four walls. The fifth wall divided the two pools.

One other interesting piece of historical trivia is there is some historical discrepancy on the way Bethesda is spelled. I tell you this because if you look it up in a Bible dictionary, you will find it spelled different ways. I don't want you to be thrown off by that.

Hanging out in the shade by these pools were people with problems. People who were blind, lame and paralyzed hung out on the sides of these pools. You get the impression these people all belonged in a nursing care facility. None of them could take themselves to the bathroom. It was hot. This place probably stunk. I picture hundreds of people struggling to control their bladders and colons packed around these pools like a refugees in a concentration camp. You have beautiful pools. You have beautiful columns. You have stinking, unloved, diseased, disabled people laying around the pool.

Now look in your Bible. Let's read verse four. (pause)

I hope you have a hard time finding it. Our pew Bibles go from verse three to five. That is the problem with these discount Bibles. I knew they were cutting corners to save costs. I just didn't know they did it by taking out verse four. In all seriousness, if you look a little closer, you will find verse four in the footnotes.

Why is verse four in the footnotes? Bible scholars tell us verse four is not in the earliest copies of the Bible. When scribes were copying the Bible by hand, one guy took the liberty to add a little explanatory note about why these disabled people hung out at the community pool. It is not like they were part of the Jerusalem swim team. Let's read his explanation.

waiting for the moving of the water; ⁴for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred the water: whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had. John 5:4 (ESV)

Some of you are uncomfortable because I just told you this verse may not be part of your Bible. Before you freak over this, remember history. Chapter divisions were not added to the Bible until the 1200s. Verse divisions were added to the Bible until the 1500s. Chapter and verse divisions are not inspired. They were added to help us find stuff. The words of the Bible are inspired; the chapter and verse divisions are not. So verse four is not Scripture, but it helps us understand what was happening. The reason it is a verse is because people didn't have old copies of the Bible to study when the verse divisions were added.

So we have big pools that were partially spring fed. If you have visited Yellowstone Park, you are familiar with the geyser Old Faithful. Old Faithful is an underground geyser that periodically erupts boiling water. While



some geysers erupt regularly, others erupt irregularly. My guess is that one of the springs which fed these pools in Bethesda erupted irregularly. The Jews, who were fascinated with angels, thought an angel stirred the pool when the

waters were swirling. I don't know. Maybe an angel stirred the waters. Maybe it was an erupting geyser. I do not know. Either way, the rumor on the street was that if you were the first one in the pool when the waters churned, you got a free healing.

Picture this. Around the pool were desperate people who should have been in a nursing facility. Everyone wanted to be first in the pool if the waters churned. Once in a while, the guy by the pool had to use the restroom. He lost his place as first in line next to the pool and ended up at the back of the line farthest away from the water. Whenever the waters churned all the blind, lame and paralyzed people dove in. The first one got a free healing and swam to the side. The rest drowned because paralyzed people can't swim. I don't know how this worked. I just hope they had a lifeguard on duty.

One pathetic man

One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. John 5:5 (ESV)

We don't know how long this guy was at the pool. We know he was an invalid for 38 years. That is a long time. In that day, most guys didn't live 38 years. We don't know how long he was by the pool but I think he was there a long time. I know we are supposed to feel sorry for him, but I just want to warn you, I think he is a real cheese ball. I think he is a completely pathetic, sorry excuse for a man. I don't usually have an overwhelming urge to punch people in the face. I am thankful he is already dead because, if he wasn't, I would probably hit him. I know some of you are going to be angry with me because I don't have a lot of compassion for this cripple, but quite honestly, he is a whiner,

complainer, coward and an all-around annoying guy. Let me show you what I mean.

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” John 5:6 (ESV)

This sounds like a bizarre question. This is like going to the hospital and talking with a guy who has an IV in his arm, tubes in his mouth and six pounds of gauze stuffed in his nose and asking him if he wants to get better. You never know, maybe he likes the morphine drip, his personal goal is to go over the limit of his health insurance coverage and he thinks hospital gowns are fashionable. Of course normal people want to be healed! Why would Jesus ask this question?

Think about this. Do you think everyone by the pool wanted to be healed? This man was a beggar. After 38 years, he perfected begging. He was a whiner. He could whine with the best of them. For the last 38 years he perfected the guilt trip. Some historical references talk about beggars in Jerusalem making a good living from their begging. This guy was begging in Jerusalem during a Jewish holiday. That was prime begging season because the people with the fat wallets were in town. This was the season to get the best handouts. Maybe this guy was on a free lunch program because of his disability. I am sure he was benefiting from some type of welfare.

I think this guy also derived some identity from his status as an invalid for 38 years. As a kid, I went to camp. On the last night, they recognized the kids who attended camp for the most years. Everyone clapped when they stood. I think it was probably the same for this man. He was king of the invalids. He

probably was the oldest invalid by the pool. He derived identity and status from his age.

By the way, that is not to say that everybody who suffers is a whiner. That is not to say we shouldn't be compassionate to those in need. Things happen that are tragic. People are involved in accidents. The bottom falls out of their lives financially through no fault of their own. Things happen. I understand that. There are legitimate victims that have legitimate needs. We must be filled with compassion.

Don't let your infirmity be your identity.

The problem is this guy made *his infirmity his identity*. He was proud that he could guilt a \$50 bill out of a coldhearted snake. He was good at it.

If Jesus healed him, things needed to change. He would have to get a job and work for a living. He would have to buy his own food and stop living off handouts and soup kitchens. There was a whole new way of life out there if Jesus healed him. Maybe he didn't want to be healed.

Don't claim you want to be healed if you don't want to change.

Over the years, I learned most people say they want healing, but they don't want to change. Healing often involves life change.

For example, people come to my office for all kinds of counseling. I usually give homework assignments. I give books to read. I give action lists to follow. Some people walk away and don't work on their homework. They want counseling but they don't want to do something different. What is the problem?

They want to be healed, but they don't want to change. Many times, you need to change to be healed.

Sometimes I talk with people about exercise, diet and fitness. They want to lose weight so I give them a simple diet plan. They read it but they don't follow it. They don't want to stop eating donuts and Doritos. They don't want to change. This guy may not have wanted to be healed. If he was healed, he had to change. He needed to get a job. He couldn't live off handouts. He needed to carry his own weight. Listen to this pathetic answer.

The fine art of blame shifting

The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me." John 5:7 (ESV)

This guy is so annoying. Jesus simply asked if he wanted healing. Instead of answering the question, he immediately told Jesus he was a victim. His inability to get in the pool after years was not his fault. It was someone else's. It was somebody else's fault for not being his friend. Whine! Whine! Whine! "I feel sorry for myself. I have no friends." Rather than trying to be a good friend, he was crying because he didn't have any friends. If you don't have friends, there is usually a reason. It is not because you have a disability. The people who don't have good friends don't have them because they aren't good friends.

To have a friend, be a friend.

Does anybody want to invite this guy over to watch the football game and sit on your couch? I don't think so. Nobody wanted to hang out with him. He

blamed everybody else for his problems. Imagine how it would unfold if he was sitting on your couch and you asked him if he wanted some chips and a Coke while watching the football game. He would tell you the reason he doesn't already have chips and a Coke is because he doesn't have good friends. If he had good friends they would have already given him one! Good friends don't act like that.

Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath. John 5:8–9 (ESV)

I love the way Jesus did this. There was not much discussion. He just healed him. It would be amazing to watch. It is fair to assume this guy's legs and body were atrophied after 38 years. Jesus healed him on the spot and gave him enough strength to carry not just his own body but to pick up his bed. I don't think it was a queen-size mattress and box spring but was bigger than a beach towel. This guy got up and was doing a military press over his head with a bed. This was the same guy who couldn't get out of bed for 38 years!

My guess is the people at the pool were probably cheering. They were happy to get rid of him. If Jesus wasn't going to heal them, the next best thing was to get this guy healed and out of their lives because he irritated people. He was a grumpy old man nobody wanted to be around.

Straining gnats and swallowing camels

So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed." John 5:10 (ESV)

Now the fun begins. Jesus healed this guy on the Sabbath. Oh no, heaven forbid. Jesus should have contained himself and waited until the next

day. Jesus broke the rules. It is a day of rest. Healing is working too hard on the Sabbath. Not only did Jesus heal this guy, he told him to clean up his mess and carry his bed home. How dare he carry his bed around on the Sabbath? The Jews completely ignored the amazing miracle of the man's healing and new legs after 38 years. All they saw was his violation of their rules and regulations. He was carrying a bed!

Why didn't they acknowledge the miracle? Why was the carrying of the bed, which was against their religious checklist, the only thing they could see? These Jews were religious people. Don't you love the religious people? You know religious people when you see them because they don't know God. All they know are lists of rules and regulations. Jesus broke their rules. Call out the Gestapo. I like the way Jesus described their thinking in the book of Matthew.

You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! Matthew 23:24 (ESV)

You guys are missing the obvious, he said.

Get rid of the checklist! Stop acting religious.

When Jesus told this invalid to carry his mat, was he violating the Sabbath law? No! The Bible doesn't say you can't carry a bed on the Sabbath. What the religious teachers did was they made lists of actions people couldn't do. They went beyond the Bible. In their teachings, they created 39 different categories of work they said couldn't be done on the Sabbath. They made a rule that said nothing should be carried on the Sabbath, even a sewing needle in your pocket. God didn't say that. They said it.

They took the principle of Sabbath rest and instead of wrestling with what those principles looked like at different times, they created checklists of rules to control people. As long as you didn't do what was on the checklist, they considered you spiritual. They wanted people to follow checklists instead of God. We may laugh at them but sometimes we do the same thing.

For example, when I was a kid, friends taught me the importance of Bible study. I was told to read my Bible first thing in the morning. That was what spiritual people did. I challenge you to find that in Scripture. The Bible does not say Christians must read their Bible every day in the morning, although it is not a wrong thing to do. As Christians, we made a list that is not in Scripture and put that on it.

Some people use the One Minute Bible. When I was a youth pastor, they told me that Bible was a great way to help kids have their daily Bible reading. They could do it in just one minute a day. Think about this. How much spiritual maturity will you get in just one minute of Bible reading a day? You are fooling yourself if you think you are growing spiritually because you read the Bible every day for less than a minute. That is religion. The principle is we are to study to show ourselves approved unto God. That may be in the morning. It may be in the evening. We are not to just read it to say we read the Bible. We are to read it. Study it. Wrestle with it. That will take more than one minute a day.

So the guy at the pool was healed. He carried his bed and the Jews were mad at him because they thought he violated the Sabbath. In reality, he was just

violating their rules. Now this guys really annoys me. Look what he did when put under a little pressure.

But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’” John 5:11 (ESV)

He went right back to the victim mentality he started with. He blamed Jesus for healing him! “It is Jesus’ fault I am carrying the bed. He told me to do it. I was sitting by the pool minding my own business. I was whining and begging like usual. Jesus healed me against my will. I am a victim. It is his fault I am strong enough to carry a bed. Go find Jesus and get angry with him.” What a squirrel. Are you getting angry with this whiner? How much more ungrateful can you get?

They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk’?” Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. John 5:12–13 (ESV)

I love this. This guy was healed after 38 years of infirmity. He picked up his bed and walked home, not even taking the time to figure out who it was that healed him. It says Jesus withdrew but it doesn’t say this guy made any effort to run Jesus down and figure out who he was. This guy was just focused on himself.

If there is anything good in my life, give God credit.

The world is filled with people like this. They are sick. They are in the hospital. God graciously heals them and what do they say? It was because they were lucky. There is a businessman that is blessed with financial success. What does he say? It was good karma. Professional football players are interviewed after a game. Who do they credit for their abilities? Themselves.

The book of James says that every good and perfect gift is from above. If there is anything good in our lives, we need to give God the credit! This guy isn't even in touch with that idea.

When we sin, we suffer.

Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you." John 5:14 (ESV)

Now we know this guy didn't deserve any mercy. This guy was an invalid for 38 years as a result of his own sin. He was not born an invalid. He chose to sin and as a consequence he suffered for 38 years. This is straightforward. It is clear in the Bible, when we sin, we will suffer. There is no way to avoid it. We don't like to admit that sin has consequences. We think we should be able to sin all day and avoid the consequences. That is not the way God wired the world. Every sin is linked to suffering that outweighs the brief sinful pleasure. A brief lie to save face can result in a loss of trust that lasts for years. You refuse to forgive as you have been forgiven, the result is the pain of broken relationships. Sin always leads to suffering which always leads to death. If we sin habitually, unrepentantly and continually, the guaranteed result is death.

I am reading between the lines a bit, but it sounds like this guy was excited to take his newfound health and go right back to the sin that made him an invalid. When he was a bedridden invalid, he couldn't sin like he wanted. When he was healed, he could sin with gusto. It reminds me of people who are in a nearly fatal accident from driving drunk. They can't drink while they are recovering in the hospital. As soon as they are healthy, where do they want to go? They head to the bar for another drink. That is sick! It is pathetic. This guy

got a second chance and he went right to his sin. There is a graphic verse that talks about this in Proverbs.

...like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly. Proverbs 26:11 (ESV)

Have you ever seen a dog do this? It is the most disgusting thing to watch a dog lick up puke. This is what this guy is doing. All of the stuff that was making him sick was vomited out. He was healed. Then he put his head back in the toilet and licked it up. That is sick, but that is what this guy was doing.

All sin brings suffering but all suffering does NOT come from sin.

Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. John 9:3 (ESV)

In John 9, the man born blind was not born blind because of his sin. Sometimes God lets people suffer because God wants to use them as a platform to bring him glory. That is why the blind man was born blind. He was born disabled to glorify God with his disability.

Not all suffering in this world is a consequences of sin but all sin will bring suffering. Let's be practical and apply this. What should we do when we face suffering? Suffering is a great time to examine our lives. It is a great time to ask the hard questions.

1. Is this suffering a consequence of my sin? --- Whenever we suffer, it is time for a serious gut check. It is time for soul searching. Is this suffering a consequence of a sinful choice?

2. Is this suffering God's loving hand of discipline to break me from sin? ---

Sometimes suffering is not a direct consequence from sin but God allows it into our life to force us to deal with hidden sin.

3. Is this suffering a platform God desires to use for his glory? --- If our suffering is not corrective, for sure it is intended and an opportunity to bring Christ glory! That Jesus for the opportunity to suffer. It is an opportunity to mature in Christ and to display the comfort we receive from Christ.

An ungrateful backstabber

The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. John 5:15 (ESV)

This really annoys me. Jesus healed this guy. He was completely ungrateful for the healing. He intentionally turned Jesus into the Sabbath police. Jesus was the guy who healed him! What a backstabber. I really want to pop him in the nose. Remember how he was complaining he didn't have any friends? Is there any question why he didn't have friends? This guy was self-absorbed and dysfunctional.

This is one crazy story. Jesus healed a guy who was an invalid for 38 years. This guy got pulled over by the Sabbath police for carrying his bed. Instead of thanking Jesus for the healing, he blame-shifted his actions to Jesus. Jesus hunted him down in the temple and loved him enough to warn him to stop sinning before something worse happened. After Jesus loved this unlovable guy by healing him and after he loved him enough to warn him about the consequences of his sin,

What makes this story amazing?

What makes this story amazing is not the Jews and their anger with Jesus. It seems they were always angry with him throughout the book of John. The ungrateful, backstabbing, self-absorbed invalid isn't that amazing. I meet those kinds of people all the time. Sometimes, I am one of them. What makes this story amazing is Jesus. Jesus knew this guy didn't deserve healing but he loved him anyway. This guy framed Jesus with the Jews but Jesus loved him again by warning him about the future consequences of his sin. Isn't Jesus amazing?

What I love about this story is I find myself identifying with this invalid. I think we all find ourselves identifying with him. We can be ungrateful, cantankerous, irritable and selfish people. This story teaches us that, amazingly, Jesus loves us anyway.

If I could put this entire story into one sound bite it would be this: When we are at our worst, Jesus is at his best. When we are at our worst, Jesus is at his best. Isn't that amazing? Let's pray.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for loving this nut case. We look at this man and see ourselves. We are whiners, complainers and irritable. Many times we are spineless in the face of pressure. Many times we claim we want healing but we don't want to change.

Thank you Jesus for forgiving us and healing us in spite of ourselves. Thank you that when we are at our worst, you are at your best. Amen.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the EFCA. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics of study are ancient rhetoric and preaching. Feel free to contact him at ktruck@gmail.com or visit his web at www.christ2Rculture.com

© Dr. Kurt Trucksess. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include the web site address (<http://www.christ2Rculture.com>) on the copied resource.

