

The Miracles of Jesus
Miracle # 8

"Jesus Heals the Lame Man At Bethesada"

John 5:1-18

It must be pointed out that all of the healing miracles of Jesus do not fit into a neat pattern. In the last miracle we examined (Luke 5:18-26), the friends of an invalid broke through a roof to let him down into the presence of Jesus. He appears to be healed on the basis of the faith of his **friends**. At other times Jesus demanded **faith** on the part of the one who was to be healed (The Healing of the Two Blind Men -Matthew 9:27-31). Obviously the raising of the dead [Jairus's daughter (Matt 9) and Lazarus (John 11)] cannot be the result of the person's faith.

In fact only a few of the 35 miracles were the consequences of faith. Verse thirteen of our text declares that the lame man did not even know who had healed him, (he did not recognize Jesus or know who he was) therefore, there can be no question then that faith was not a **condition** of his healing. In the miracle that we will examine tonight we will see that He simply commanded a man to be healed not because he believed, but because it was His **will**.

The Background of the Miracle (vv. 1-5)

"After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. (2) Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. (3) In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. (4) For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.(5) Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years."

According to John, Jesus has traveled from Galilee to Jerusalem in order to celebrate a feast or festival. We don't know for sure which one, but it may have been the feast of **Pentecost**, a feast commemorating the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. When he was in Jerusalem, Jesus went to the Pool of Bethesda, also known as Bethsaida, where *"a great multitude of sick people"* gathered. Fittingly the name Bethesda means "house of **mercy**." The attraction of the pool given in verse four is omitted in some of the versions, because it was thought by some to be a later addition. At any rate, it was said that an angel of the Lord would at certain times come down to the pool and disturb the surface of the water and the first person to enter the pool there-after was cured of any illness. Whether or not this had ever in fact happened, that was what these people believed. In the multitude of people gathered there was one certain man who had been afflicted for 38 years.

The Elements of the Miracle (vv. 6-9, 14)

"When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" (7) The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while

I am coming, another steps down before me." (8) Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." (9) And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath."

It is interesting to note that Jesus does not heal everyone at that the pool that day but as He moved among the blind and the lame, he spotted one particular man who had been ill for 38 years. The Bible does not say the nature of his disease other than it rendered him unable to walk, nor why among so many Jesus chose this man to heal.

"Do you want to be made well?"

As we noted at the beginning Jesus did not always demand faith; but he did demand **agreement**. He would not have healed this man against his will.

But there is even more being asked here as well, he had been an invalid for nearly forty years, during that time he had lived by the pity of others collecting alms, if he is healed he will have to be responsible for himself. He will have find work; he will be entering a whole new world. It would be the equivalent today of asking a person who had lived on welfare if they were willing to give up in order to be well.

In fact some people will go to extraordinary lengths to avoid unwelcome changes in their lives.

"Dave Reavor, a disabled Vietnam veteran, tells of a young man in the 1960's who did not want to be drafted. So he had all of his teeth pulled to make himself unfit for military duty. But when he took his physical, he was declared unfit because of his flat feet."

The lame man did not answer Jesus' question directly but rather said, that he had no one to place him in the pool when it was disturbed. In saying this he declared that he had lost not only his ability to walk but all **hope** as well.

"Rise, take up your bed and walk"

Jesus did not discuss the pool or its alleged abilities to provide a cure, He simply told the man to get up, take up your bed and walk.

Seeing that you have been made well go and Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you (v. 14)

"Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."

A literal translation of the Greek is "don't **keep** on sinning." Why was he told to stop sinning? Was the disability really caused by his sin? What could be worse than suffering from a disability for thirty-eight years?

Whether or not we think that he is implying that this man's original condition was due to his sins, Jesus warning is that he is not to take his healing for granted. It is also significant to note that when he is told to "stop sinning" it is in effect the same as being told to **repent**.

The Effect of the Miracle (vv. 10-18)

First, the miracle results in the immediate healing of the lame man.

"And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath."

I want you to notice three things about the Lord's healing power. If you should encounter someone who claims to have healing power today, measure their claims against these Bible truths.

1. Jesus' healing was **instantaneous**.
2. It was **complete**. He arose and walked although he had not walked in 38 years.
3. Jesus' miracles were **undeniable**.

John adds an additional dimension to the miracle when he relates that the incident took place on the Sabbath.

Second, the miracle causes a great "Sabbath Controversy."

In verse nine we were told, "*And that day was the Sabbath*" on which the miracle was performed.

The Old Testament taught that a person should do no work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-10). By Jesus' time the rabbis had expanded this simple command by going into great detail as to what constituted "work."

The Gospels record seven Sabbath healings

1. Jesus healed the demoniac in the Synagogue at Capernaum (Mark 1:21-28)
2. Jesus heals Peter's Mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-34)
3. Jesus heals the cripple at Bethesda (John 5:1-18)
4. Jesus heals the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1-6)
5. Jesus heals the man born blind (John 9:1-7)
6. Jesus healed the woman bound by Satan (Luke 13:10-17)
7. Jesus heals a man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-6)

So what we have with this miracle is another Sabbath miracle. I believe that Jesus worked this miracle on the Sabbath on purpose to focus the attention of the religious leaders on the fact that they are missing the **original** purpose of the Sabbath and fact he is **LORD** over the Sabbath.

"The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed." (11) He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, "Take up your bed and walk." (12) Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, "Take up your bed and walk'?" (13) But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. ... (15) The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well."

The healed man is intercepted by the religious leaders who inform him that he is breaking the law by carrying his bed on the Sabbath. They are not concerned about this man – they do not even acknowledge that he has been healed – let alone rejoice over it. Their only concern is that this man is breaking the rules – their rules. He tells them that the one who commanded him to get up and walk is the one who also commanded him to carry his bed.

Once informed that Jesus is the one who healed the lame man, the Jews cease to harass the healed man and fix their attention on Jesus.

Third, the miracle results in the religious leaders rejection of Jesus

"For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath."

John tells us that the religious leaders began to "*persecute Jesus.*" An important feature of this miracle is that it began an open conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders that would culminate at the cross. Because this miracle was done on the Sabbath day, it gave raise to the first demonstration of rejection on the part of the religious leadership.

Jesus now further added to the rejection of the religious leaders in verse seventeen, by declaring the he was **equal** with the father. *"But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." (18) Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God."*

Jesus defends His actions by pointing out that He is mere imitating His father. Jesus states that that God's creative and sustaining work upon which the world depends has never ceased nor will it. He says, **"My Father is working and I am working too!"**

The Jews immediately grasp what he was saying. Jesus is stating He is **equal** with God. The religious leaders did not reject Christ because they did not understand who he claimed to be, they understood perfectly, and rejected him **because** of these claims.

Notice that John does not tells us that from this point on the Jewish authorities are trying to kill Jesus, it says for this reason **"the Jews were trying even harder to kill Him."** The authorities have already determined that he must be put to death. This incident only provided them with added incentive for doing it as soon as possible.

There are some that suggest that this miracle is **"not so much a story of an actual event as it is an allegory. [An allegory is a story in which every event has an inner meaning.] ...It has been suggested that in this story the helpless man stands for Israel. The thirty-eight years stand for the thirty-eight years during which the people wandered in the wilderness (Deut. 2:14). The five porches stand for the five books of the Law (the first five books of the O.T.). The Law could tell a man what was wrong with his life and show him his sin, but it could never help him mend himself or cure his sin. The Law, like the porches, was the shelter of people who were ill and knew it, who were morally helpless and could do nothing about it. The pool stands for the waters of baptism through which a man enters a new life with a new goodness and a new power, leaving his sins behind him.'**

[William Barclay. And He Had Compassion: The Miracles of Jesus. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1992) p. 174]

But this reads to much like an eye-witness account for that. We are better to take it as a real life story of an extraordinary miracle which Jesus performed on a poor helpless man who had lost all hope.

Because This Miracle Mentions Angels Perhaps Further Consideration About Angels Is Warranted.

Today's world is deeply interested in angels, but the world's concept of angels in not always a **biblical** one. Angels whether they are depicted in movies or television, in countless books (more that 75 currently in print) and magazine articles or described by someone who has seen one, they are always depicted as beneficent and protective. But we have come not to expecting theological accuracy from Hollywood, but sometimes even respect and decency are lacking. For example in the movie "Michael" actor John Travolta portrays a profane archangel who is a brawling, promiscuous, but lovable slob.

Perhaps influencing more people than any other format are the over one hundred episodes of a series entitled "Touched by an Angel" and millions of viewers who have exposed to its subtle teachings.

So what false views do these and other modern portrayals of angels teach us.

1. Man is basically **good**, sin is not the problem but just disconnectedness with God.

Although the show "Touched by an Angel," for example, does expose the viewers to a God that exists and that has an active and concerned love for man. Yet there is room for concern that it also expresses a redemption that cost nothing, stories that warm the heart but do not convict the soul.

2. They were created Angels and are not formerly **humans**.

Almost everyone remembers the angel "Clarence" from the Christmas classic "It is a Wonderful Life" who is trying to earn his wings. It is a great story but poor theology. Angels are **supernatural** spirit beings created by God. Before the creation of man, angels were in existence: for when the foundations of the world were laid, "**the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.**" (Job 38:7). After the fall of man, angels were sent to guard the tree of life, all this before a single human being had died.

3. All Angels Are **Good**.

In their original state they were **holy**, but before the creation of the world some of them rebelled against God and lost this exalted position.

When Satan fell from Heaven (see Ezek. 28:11-19, Isa. 14:12-17) unfortunately he did not fall alone, he took a percentage of the angelic host with him (perhaps as many as **one-third** according to Revelation 12:4). All these fallen angels now known as **Demons** do the bidding of Satan and attempt to extend his kingdom.

So beware of getting your theology concerning angels from Hollywood!