

**“Grace. Period.”**  
**John 5:1-9**

**Ben Johnston-Krase**  
**May 5, 2013**

*After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup>Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. <sup>3</sup>In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed, (waiting for the stirring of the water; <sup>4</sup>for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred up the water; whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was made well from whatever disease that person had.) <sup>5</sup>One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup>When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” <sup>7</sup>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 making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” <sup>8</sup>Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” <sup>9</sup>At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a Sabbath.*

Take a moment, if you will, and think back to the year 1975. I realize, of course, that that’s impossible for a bunch of you who hadn’t been born yet. But a few of you were around back then. Don’t hurt your brain, but how old were you in 1975? Think about that year for a second. 1975...

- Gerald Ford hadn’t been president for quite a year yet
- Gas cost 44 cents a gallon
- 1975 was the year that Saturday Night Live debuted on NBC
- It was also the year that the movie *Jaws* came out
- The Brewers only been in Milwaukee for 5 years
- In 1975 the Brewers’ shortstop, Robin Yount, was just 20 and playing his second year in the big leagues—his salary for the year was \$16,000.

On this day in 1975 I was just four years old—still a year away from kindergarten. What were you doing in 1975? Where were you living and who were you living with?

And now take a moment, if you will, and think about *all those years between 1975 and today*. All those years, all those milestones, all those memories. Think about how much *life* has been *lived* between the years 1975 and 2013. Births, deaths, marriages, family, work, trips taken, great moments of joy, great moments of sadness... It’s a lot, isn’t it? So much can happen in 38 years...

Jesus goes to Jerusalem and heads over to Bethesda—to this pool which at the time was surrounded by people who were suffering from various sorts of illnesses and disabilities. Now you need to know that this was no ordinary pool. Legend had it that from time to time, the waters were magically stirred, and when they were, at that moment an angel would appear and heal the first person who got into the water. Jesus comes to this pool and sees among those waiting by its side, *a man who’s been ill for 38 years*.

Just another detail in another story from the Bible—the man by the pool had been ill for 38 years. But when we play 38 years out in our own lives—when we stop and consider what nearly *four decades feels like* in this world, we perhaps pause to wonder *a little more vividly* what life has been like for this man.

Jesus approaches the pool and the man and asks him, “Do you want to be made well?” Seems like a strange question to ask a person who’s been sick for 38 years, doesn’t it? Someone who’s likely tried everything there is to try to become well again, a man who’s been sick much longer than he’s been well, a man who’s grasped at every straw he can think of and is now languishing next to the “Pool of Last Resort”—a place where he and a few other dozen of the desperate cling to a far-fetched hope of healing.

Jesus sees the man lying there and asks him, “Do you want to be made well?” And the man replies, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” In other words, “Will you wait here with me? My family and friends—they’ve all abandoned me. Feels like the whole world has left me here...”

All of this was likely true. If we think about this man’s life at the end of a long 38 years... He smelled. He was hungry. When he wasn’t watching the pool, he was begging for food to eat. And if he wasn’t begging for food, he was begging for someone to wait with him to carry him into the water. He wouldn’t have told you this, probably, but all he *really* wanted was someone to wait with him. In his mind, maybe, he knew the water wasn’t going to heal him. Perhaps he knew that this whole *angel-stirring-the-water-story* was a pile of garbage—a hopeful pile of garbage, maybe, but nonetheless, a pile of garbage. What he really wanted was someone to wait with him—to sit with him—to talk with him—to be human with him...

But then a curious thing happens. Jesus says to the man, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” I say “curious” because lots of times in the gospels, we hear Jesus say something like, “Your faith has made you well,” or maybe we see Jesus turning to his disciples to exclaim, “Never have I found such faith!” But not this time. In fact, there is *no mention of faith in this scene*. None. Jesus simply says to the man, “Stand up, take your mat, and walk.”

We could even pause to wonder if the man by the pool *even knew who Jesus was*. In other stories from the gospel, those who might be healed called him “Lord,” “Rabbi,” or “Teacher.” But the man by the pool called him “Sir,” which was likely how he addressed anyone who might be persuaded to sit with him a while. No faith statement, no acknowledgement before *or even after* the healing of who Jesus was. In fact, when the Jewish authorities stop him for carrying his mat on the Sabbath and ask him, “Who told you to take up your mat and walk?” the man has *no earthly clue!* Maybe he was so excited to stand up, it never occurred to him to ask who Jesus was.

But here’s the real kicker. Jesus approaches the man later and the two chat for a bit. And afterwards, the man *still* doesn’t express an ounce of faith, but rather *goes straight to the authorities and tells them that it was Jesus who told him to take up his mat on Sabbath—that Jesus was the one to blame!*

So to recap: no faith statement, no expression of faith in God or Jesus, no sense, even, of who Jesus was, and when he finally figures it all out, the man who had been sick for 38 years blames Jesus for commanding him to carry his mat on the Sabbath!

I love this story because it screams out from John's gospel that if there's hope for a man like that, *there must be hope for you and me*. It's a story that proclaims the once-and-for-all-blessed truth that what *matters most* in this world is not our love for God but rather *God's love for us*. And that, friends, is grace. Period.