

## The Third Sign: Healing at the Pool of Bethesda, John 5:1-29

1. John loves to describe the variety of paths to Jesus, such as the calling of skeptical Nathaniel under the fig tree; the cynical woman at the well; the inquisitive but uncomprehending Nicodemus; and the long, dark walk of the royal official wondering whether his boy will live. This man's journey has the feel of a counter example: He doesn't **seek** Jesus (like Peter or the royal official). When Jesus reveals his power, he doesn't try to **determine who** Jesus is (like the Samaritan woman). He doesn't **thank** Jesus (like the 10<sup>th</sup> leper). He doesn't **defend** Jesus to the authorities (like the man born blind). John doesn't tell us what becomes of him, only that he hands Jesus' name to the Jewish leaders, whether out of cluelessness or fear.

What can we learn about finding Jesus through this man's story?

2. When Jesus is accused in the synoptics of breaking the Sabbath he responds:
  - a. The promised new age has dawned in which the Sabbath and other laws and institutions have been reinterpreted and fulfilled
  - b. Jesus' presence means that something more than the temple has arrived
  - c. Compassion trumps rigorous application of the Sabbath traditions and laws

How does Jesus respond to the charges in 17? Is it what you would have expected?

3. Jesus' response to the Sabbath charges distances himself from others. Had he used the "mercy not sacrifice" defense he would have been saying *all* children of God should act this way. Instead, Jesus says that as the *only Son* he works because his Father is working.

He follows this in 19-24 by unpacking the healing by the pool: Good sons always do what their fathers do (so a good carpenter's son is a carpenter), and Jesus knows what God is doing because God loves and teaches him (again, just like a good father ought to). So we shouldn't be surprised that the Son, like the Father, brings life, and what's more, will bring new life. So the healing, amazing as it is, represents a far deeper reality. This is the third sign.

This sign tells us who Jesus uniquely is. At the same time, we too are children of God, and there is a pattern here for us to imitate. We see Peter doing all of these things in Acts 2: listening to the Father, reaching out, offering life, etc., and Jesus uses the same father-son logic when he teaches about prayer, telling us to address God as Father and reminding us that good fathers give good gifts (Lk 11). It reminds us that God wants to be no less close to you than he is to Jesus; has things to teach you; wants you to engage in the "family business" of reaching out and offering life to others.

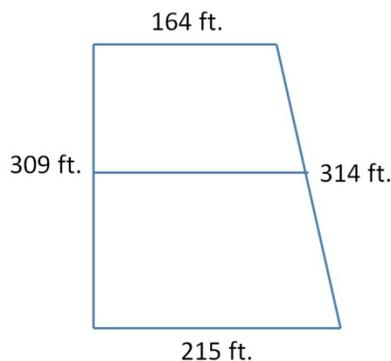
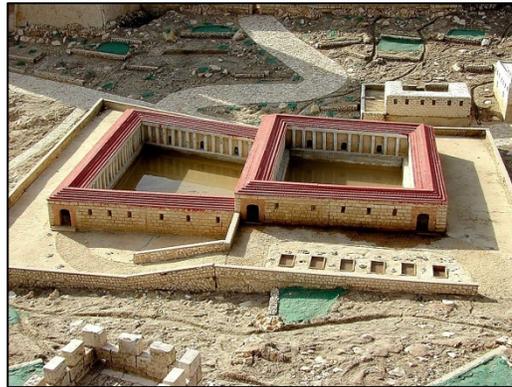
Where in your ministries and relationship with God do you most resonate with this paradigm of listening to God; reaching out; offering life?

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*Fun fact:* “The consensus amongst the rabbis was that God works on the Sabbath, for otherwise providence itself would weekly go into abeyance.” At the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century four prominent rabbis agreed that God doesn’t violate the Sabbath because the entire universe is his home and so he can’t carry anything outside it and God never lifts anything higher than his own stature. (Carson, 247)

*Fun archeological fact:* Scholarly consensus has it that the pool of Bethesda was located next to the present-day compound of St. Anne’s, which has been under French domain since 1856, “when the Ottoman Sultan presented the site to France in gratitude for the support given to Turkey during the Crimean War.” It is currently administered by the “White Fathers,” the Roman Catholic Missionaries of Africa.

Excavation there has found a trapezoidal pair of pools separated by a wall, which would allow for the required five porticoes. Not surprisingly, there are layers upon layers on top of the original pool. On top of the pool was built a 5<sup>th</sup>-century Byzantine church and a 12<sup>th</sup>-c. chapel thought by Jeremias to have been built by crusaders. Beneath the 5<sup>th</sup>-c. basilica is evidence (paintings, coins, votives, etc.) of a 1<sup>st</sup>-c. pagan sanctuary. (*Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 27.1, 2017, 65-84.)



## Extra questions and observations:

1. Obs.: This is a healing without faith
2. Were the Jews really bothered by the healing and the carrying of the mat, or was something else the motivation for their opposition?
3. The traditions of the Jews and Sabbath observance were central cultural boundary markers and were jealously guarded as a way of preserving the integrity of the Jewish people even under Roman occupation. Much of the opposition Jesus experienced was because he was dissolving these. What boundary markers do we have as Western evangelical Christians? (E.g. church attendance, dress, and in some cases, political party affiliation.)
4. The traditions of the Jews were famously intended to put a fence around the law. Jesus' Sabbath practices crossed into this no-man's land, showing the dangers of such a practice. Where do we also put a fence around the law? (E.g. we don't want to complain, so we assiduously avoid saying negative things, even when it might be healthy; we don't want to gossip, so we never share information, even when the information ought to be shared, etc.)
5. Obs./Quest.: Keller makes a point out of Jesus' seeking this man rather than being sought. This may be good Reformed theology (and represents a salvation principle from Romans) but isn't good exegesis, since we have already seen examples in John (e.g. the healing of the royal official's son) where Jesus wasn't the initiator. That's the observation. The question form would be: "Why is this the wrong text from which to draw this general principle?"
6. Obs.: The narrative function of the story is in the relationships between the three players: Jesus, the man, and the "Jews". As such, this not only tells us about a path to Jesus but also about the conflict we can expect when we pursue Jesus.

## Leader's Intro:

I listened to three sermons on this passage. The practical challenge of this passage is that its central meaning is about Jesus' relationship with the Father (it is a sign after all), and this feels quite basic. So each of the sermons went afield from the text to find things to talk about. Dennis talked about the history of the pool, which is quite interesting, but not central. Keller talked about the ways we seek "healing" (wholeness) apart from Jesus. So e.g.:

Dennis: This is a healing at the pool of Bethesda. The text says there are 5 porches (shaded colonades) around it. This puzzled people for years. They said, look, there are NO examples of pentagonal pools in antiquity; this is clearly invented by John who probably wrote this near the end of the first century long after Jerusalem was destroyed. Probably he intended the "five" to refer to the five books of the Law, and he was a Law-basher. Anyway, it shows you can't trust the historicity of the Bible.

And so for a long time this story was used to undermine confidence in the Bible. Until they found the pool. It looks like the pictures on p. 2 above.

There are five colonades: four around the four sides and one down the middle. Now it's used as an example of how John must have been an eye witness or had access to eye witness info, and can be trusted. (Which is why when people point to something in the Bible which doesn't seem to make sense, the best advice is wait and see.)

That's Dennis. Keller instead focused on how Jesus asks this guy, "do you want to be well", and the guy says, "I don't have anyone to carry me to the pool", not realizing that Jesus is offering a wellness which is beyond what he could imagine. Keller says, we all seek wholeness in career, relationships, etc., and see to seek them in Jesus. (Keller also makes a big deal out of Jesus' seeking this guy out, rather than the other way around, which is part of the Reformed rhetoric. But it's bad exegesis, since in the first two Signs Jesus was *not* the initiator--both Jesus' mom and the royal official seek Jesus out, not the other way around.) So yes, Keller's right that we seek wholeness elsewhere and shouldn't.

He's also right that God moves in us to seek him. But the central messages of the passage are:

1. Jesus has authority over the Sabbath as the only Son of God
2. Jesus has authority to heal. We've already seen this, but John's contrasting Jesus' power with that of healing pools and other superstitions and since John gives over and over paths to Jesus, you might add the lesser point:
3. Jesus reaches out even to people don't get it, have no initiative or gratitude, etc. (This guy is a real lame-o. When Jesus heals him, he doesn't bother to even ask Jesus' name, much less who he is. He doesn't seek Jesus out the second time, either--Jesus seeks him out. And when the authorities pressure him he names names, which may have been cluelessness but is also this guy wanting to get out of trouble.)

So all three sermons see big tangents which have nothing to do with these main points. But I can't blame them too much. The main points are going to be well known by most of the listeners, and you gotta fill out the hour.

So in this passage I think the best approach is to acknowledge that it is saying something we might find basic, but that it is more subtle than we might realize. So we first need to make sure we are reading the text closely and not just breezing over it with the facile conclusion that Jesus is God. Once we have done that, we can broaden the scope to related but not central points about

One other point: The patristic commentators in ACCS surprisingly have some interesting comments, once they get done making silly comments about the symbolism of five colonnades, etc.

## Notes

### I. Background

- a. It's not clear what feast John has in mind, so it's unlikely that it's important to the point John is making
- b. The language around the phrase "sheep gate" is a little unclear. It's reasonable to think that he's referring to the same thing as in Neh 3:1, 32; 12:39, which is a little opening in the north wall of the city, a little way west of the NE corner (Carson)
- c. There are many variations to the name of the pool (Bethesda, Bethzatha, etc.). Bethesda seems to be the best attested, and is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew *bet esda*, or "house of outpouring".
- d. "Some ancient witnesses speak of the redness of the water, popularly thought to be medicinal: the spring may have been *chalybeate*." (Carson)

### II. Words and Phrases

- a. ...

### III. Themes

- a. The strange dialogue
  - i. "Jesus' question, 'do you want to get well?', is often given a 'psychologizing' interpretation: Jesus is establishing that the first step toward wholeness is always a deep desire for it (e.g. Barclay). But John does not develop the narrative in that direction. Jesus' question is best taken as one of the elliptical offers he is constantly making in this gospel (e.g. 4:10; 6:32, 33)." (Carson)
  - ii. "In terms of initiative, quick-wittedness, eager faith and a questing mind, this invalid is the painful opposite of everything that characterizes the wonderful character in John 9." (Carson)
- b. The sabbath and the Son of Man
  - i. The synoptics give the following reasons for apparent violation of the Sabbath:
    1. "because Jesus and his followers constitute a messianic and Davidic community, the promised new age has dawned in which the Sabbath and other laws and institutions have been reinterpreted and fulfilled"
    2. Jesus' presence means that something more than the temple has arrived
    3. Elementary consideration of compassion warrant setting aside rigorous application of the Sabbath provisions where those provisions and compassion conflict
  - ii. "By OT standards, it is not clear the healed man was contravening the law, since he did not normally carry mats around for a living; according to the 'tradition of the elders' the man *was* breaking the law, since he was contravening one of the prohibited 39 categories of work to which the law was understood to refer." (Carson)
- c. Sin and disease

### IV. Observations

- a. Possible fun fact: "The OT had forbidden work on the Sabbath. But what is 'work'? The assumption in the Scripture seems to be that 'work' refers to one's customary employment; but judging by Mishnah (*Shabbath* 7:2; 10:5), dominant rabbinic opinion had analysed the prohibition into 39 classes of work, including taking or carrying anything from one domain to another (except for cases of compassion, such as carrying a paralytic)." (Carson, 244)

### V. Questions

- a. Elsewhere in the NT Jesus makes the point that ailments aren't necessarily the result of sin (aside from the sin of the Fall). However, there are instances recorded in which sin leads to disease (Acts

5:1-11; 1 Cor 11:30; 1 Jn 5:16). So Jesus' "make sure you don't sin so that something worse happens" may refer to hell, but may also refer to temporal consequences since as disease. Q1: Can you think of even one time where sin has led to ailment? Q2: Did Jesus present the man with the gospel? Why or why not?

**VI. To do**

a. ...

## Below follow two teachings by Gary DeLashmutt...

### Introduction

This is the third of seven **signs**. Remember that a sign is a miracle performed by Jesus which points beyond itself to teach us something about Jesus and his provision for humanity. Usually Jesus couples his sign with an explanation so that no one will miss the point. In this sign, Jesus' subsequent explanation makes the point unmistakable: he is the **giver of life**.

### The Sign (vs 1-9a)

Read vs 1-4. Vs 3b,4 were not written by John and therefore do not belong in the biblical text. It is (or should be) bracketed because they are not in any of the earliest manuscripts, and where it appears in later manuscripts it is often marked to signal probable spuriousness.<sup>[1]</sup> It is a marginal explanatory note that later got incorporated into the text. It explains what people believed concerning the pool, but the biblical text does not affirm this. It was probably a local superstition, like Fatima or Lourdes today.

**THE PROBLEM:** When God looks at the human race, what does he see? Something like vs 3! People who are sick, helpless, banking on false cures . . .

We don't like to look at it this way. We think, "I've got a few problems, but I'm basically OK. So I can't succeed in relationships? So I lack direction and purpose for my life?" We're so used to our condition, it doesn't seem so bad (SKID-ROW BUMS' SMELL).

But God says we are "lost," "without hope" (Eph. 2:12); "sinners," "helpless," "enemies" (Rom. 5:6,8,10)! We are alienated from him to such an extent that we would never seek him unless he first sought us. We are broken people, damaged in every area (physically, psychologically, emotionally, intellectually, etc.) as a result of our alienation from him. This is the true human condition!

**THE QUESTION:** Read vs 5. This man is especially helpless. So Jesus asks him vs 6b. This sounds like a stupid question--but the man's answer reveals the wisdom of it. Amazingly, he doesn't answer Jesus' question--he just complains about the neighbors and the injustice of the system (read vs 7)! He is so thoroughly defeated that he has given up all hope and is just waiting to die.

This is what so many of us are like. Christ is asking us "Do **you** wish to get well?" but we're focused on how bad we have it, how others have mistreated us, on how much better others have it than we do, etc. There is a perverse pleasure and security in playing the victim. ("It may be a mud puddle, but at least I'm familiar with it!") Some of us would rather complain about our situation than allow Jesus Christ to make us well!!

In his love, Jesus cuts the man off and speaks a word of command that contains an implicit promise (vs 8). As with the royal official in 4:50a, he calls on this man to respond to his Word by taking a step of faith.

**THE RESULT:** This healing was incontestable, instantaneous and complete. Not only was his paralysis healed--but his atrophied muscles were also restored so that he could walk away. This is typical of Jesus' healings--so different from the so-called "healings" of invisible ailments (insomnia; back pain) which are only partially (at best) restored.

It is also a picture of salvation. When we agree that we are alienated from God, helpless to save ourselves, and when we are willing to put our trust in Jesus Christ's promise to reconcile us to God, we are instantaneously and completely restored to spiritual life. Jesus draws this connection for us a little later in this chapter, but first we have a controversy . . .

## The Controversy (vs 9b-16)

Read vs 9b . . . uh-oh! It was the Sabbath! Read vs 10 (SABBATH POLICE >> SIRENS >> "PULL OVER, BUDDY!"). Why is this a problem?

The Old Testament law commanded Sabbath observance to memorialize God's work of creation, to give people and animals a break--and to remind his people to trust God to provide their material needs according to his covenant promises (HARVEST TIME).

But by this time, Sabbath observance became a hallmark of Jewish piety. Religious Jews had a super-anal obsession with what determining exactly it meant to "work." In the Talmud, there are 39 classes of work forbidden on the Sabbath. You think we've had BLUE LAWS!! This discussion takes up 24 long chapters and goes into such detail that "one would scarcely imagine a sane intellect would seriously entertain."<sup>[2]</sup>

For example, you were allowed to pick up a chair and put it down somewhere else in your own home--but you weren't allowed to drag it because this might make a groove in the dirt floor and thus be "plowing." You could spit on stones, but there was a grave debate on whether it was lawful to spit on the ground--because this too might be "plowing." Women were forbidden to look in the mirror on the Sabbath, because they might discover a white hair and pluck it out--which was "reaping." There was a huge debate over whether you could repair a broken sandal on the Sabbath. You couldn't tie or untie a knot. You could dip a radish into salt, but not too long, for this would be to make pickle. You couldn't climb a tree, or ride, or swim, or clap your hands, or dance.

In the area of "carrying," you couldn't carry anything heavier than a dried fig. If a man threw an object up with his right hand and caught it with his left hand, this was carrying. But if he threw it up and caught it in his mouth and ate it, it was not carrying because after being eaten the object no longer existed. And of course, Sabbath laws forbade helping sick people unless their sickness was life threatening.<sup>[3]</sup>

So this man, and Jesus, were definitely guilty! Read vs 11. Did they say, "What? He made you well after all those years? Praise God! Who was this guy? He may be the Messiah, because the prophets predicted he would make the 'lame leap like a deer' (Isa. 35:6)." NOOOOO!! Read vs 12. As we'll soon see, they wanted to know who it was so they could get him for conspiracy to break the Sabbath!

Read vs 13-15. Jesus is probably telling him that his spiritual condition is more important than his former physical malady, and calling him to believe in him so he doesn't go to hell. The man's response may have been a witness for Christ rather than rattling on him . . .

Read vs 16. This is a religious misuse of morality! This is not just a Jewish problem! This is religion world-wide, and it is still with us today!

Christianity upholds the Law of God, which has real moral content (LUST, GREED, HATE, USING PEOPLE; LACK OF LOVE). When we focus on it, it makes us aware of our true moral guilt so we realize we need God's forgiveness through Christ.

But religion focuses on man-made, external, keepable rules (2 MPH OVER SPEED LIMIT; "GOSH; DARN; HECK;" DON'T RE-USE UNMARKED STAMP;" NO "R" MOVIES). By doing this, we can deceive ourselves

into thinking we are righteous. This provides a way to avoid admitting real moral failure and come to God with honesty and humility.

Religion is therefore the enemy of biblical faith. Religion called God the devil (Mt. 12). Religion nailed Jesus to the cross. Religion killed the God it claimed to love.

No wonder Jesus hated religion! No wonder he reserved his harshest words for these guys (Matt. 23 curses)!! He confronted the "sinners," but not with this kind of fierceness, because they knew they had a problem with God. But the religionists deceived themselves into thinking they were righteous >> PHARISEE & PUBLICAN.

## The Claims (vs 17-29)

Jesus knew it was the Sabbath, and he purposefully healed the man on this day to provoke this controversy! The controversy between them hinged on the issue of **authority**. If Jesus rejected their authority to interpret the Sabbath law, what higher authority did he appeal to? His answer is to assert that **he** has divine authority--because he is God!

Vs 17,18: The rabbis agreed that God could work on the Sabbath. Jesus claims to have **unique relationship with the Father**, thus sharing his nature--and he does not correct their conclusion! "You're talking to God right now, so adopt a different attitude!"

Vs 19,20: He claims to have a **unique level of personal intimacy and working harmony with the Father**. Therefore, this healing has the Father's approval in spite of their censure.

Vs 21: He claims to be **the bestower of life** just like the Father (1 Sam. 2:6; Jn. 1:4). He is not under their authority; he has the authority to give life to whomever he wishes.

Vs 22: He claims to have **the authority to judge**--which belongs exclusively to God (Deut. 1:17).

Vs 23: Therefore, he claims to deserve the same honor as the Father.

Especially when we realize that these claims were made to strict monotheists, it is undeniable that he was claiming to be the one true God. This is very polarizing. You can't make Jesus into one more good teacher who only pointed to God--because he claimed to be God. You can't make him into one more pantheistic spiritual master who said we're all God--because he simply isn't saying that. You have to reject him as a liar or a nut--or you have to cast yourself on him as your Lord and your God. Which will it be???

But the emphasis of these claims is that **Jesus gives life**--both now and in the future. Read vs 24-29.

The man lying by the pool was **dying**--but Jesus gave him life. We, like the man, are also dying. It's just a matter of time. Jesus offers to give us life, to make us alive to God right now, and to spare us from judgment and have eternal life in the future.

Billy Graham at Nixon's funeral: "This death should cause you to think about your own death . . . when what matters will not be what **people** think about you--but what **God** thinks about you--**his** judgment, **his** verdict." You may say, "I don't believe in a final judgment." Well, Jesus says there will be a final judgment whether you believe in it or not! Your beliefs do not create reality; they need to come into line with reality as it is revealed to us through God's Word!

What determines whether you are raised for life for judgment? Sabbath-keeping? Religious rule-keeping? No-belief in Jesus (vs 24). The "good" in vs 29 refer in context to believing in Jesus as God's Messiah and Savior. The "evil" refers to refusal to believe in him.

Jesus doesn't just make these claims without giving us any evidence for them. NEXT, we'll look at the different lines of evidence he gives--sufficient evidence to make a decision to trust him. Are you willing to hear the evidence?

## Footnotes

<sup>[1]</sup> Philip W. Comfort and Wendell C. Hawley, *Opening the Gospel of John* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1994), pp. 90,91.

<sup>[2]</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), Book II, p. 778.

<sup>[3]</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Book II, pp. 778-787.

## Introduction

We're in the third week of a series on seven miracles in the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John is the fourth book of the New Testament, and John was a disciple of Jesus, eye-witness of these events, and author of 5 New Testament books. John organizes the first half of his gospel (chap. 1-12) around 7 miracles performed by Jesus.

These miracles are “shallow enough for babies to wade in, but deep enough for elephants to drown in.” Their basic account of how Jesus supernaturally met real people’s physical and social needs is simple and easy to grasp. But they are also profound “signs”—symbolic acts pointing beyond themselves to Jesus’ divinity and designed to lead us to faith in Jesus so he meet our deepest spiritual needs (see Jn. 20:30,31). Let’s see how this works with the third miracle, in which Jesus heals a paralyzed man . . .

## The Setting

Read 5:1,2. The action has switched from Galilee to Jerusalem. Critics used to claim that the author could not have been John because no such pool ever existed—but the Bethesda pool has now been excavated exactly as John describes it here.

Read 5:3,4. 5:3b,4 was not written by John and therefore does not belong in the biblical text. It should be bracketed (as in NASB) or deleted (as in NIV) because it is not in any of the earliest manuscripts, and where it appears in later manuscripts it is often marked to signal probable spuriousness.<sup>1</sup> It is probably a marginal explanatory note (of 5:7) that later got incorporated into the text—namely, it explains a local superstition about the pool, but the biblical text does not affirm this belief.

Read 5:5. Lying among the multitude of handicapped people is a man who has been paralyzed (as we’ll see below) for 38 years. With no governmental social services and probably ostracized by the religious leaders, this man has a wretched existence—spending most of his daytime hours by this pool . . .

## The Miracle

Read 5:6. Jesus could tell by the man’s atrophied limbs that he had been paralyzed for a long time. What kind of question is this to be asking this man? He’s paralyzed, isn’t he? He’s down by the pool, isn’t he? But the man’s answer reveals the wisdom of Jesus’ question . . .

Read 5:7. He doesn’t answer Jesus’ question! Rather, he focuses on how he has been mistreated by others. The man is so beaten down by life that his sickness and the negative results of his sickness have become inseparable from his identity as a person.

Read 5:8. Jesus redirects the conversation by speaking an authoritative word. As with the royal official, Jesus (implicitly) promises the man he will heal him, and issues a command by which the man is to express his trust in Jesus’ word.

Read 5:9a. As the man acted by faith, he experienced the supernatural fulfillment of Jesus’ word. This is very different from the kinds of “healings” done by the “healer-dealers” today! Many are nothing more than rank charlatanism—staged events designed to fleece sick people of their money. Others involve mainly invisible ailments like insomnia, migraines, and back pain, and produce only partial and/or temporary restoration. This healing (like all of Jesus’ and the apostles’ healings) was *incontestable* (everyone knew of his obvious

sickness), *instantaneous* (paralysis is gone) and *complete* (even his atrophied muscles were also restored so that he could walk away).

SUMMARY: By seeking out and healing this man, Jesus demonstrated both his compassion for those who suffer and his authority over serious chronic illness. So much for the miracle—what is the “sign?” What does this miracle reveal about Jesus’ true identity as the Son of God and his ability to meet the deepest spiritual needs of those who believe in him as the Son of God (re-read 20:31)? There are two ways in which this miracle is a “sign” . . .

## The “Sign” – Jesus is God

The first clue is *when* Jesus healed this man (read 5:9b). He wants us to know that Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath.

This begins a new section in John’s gospel (ch. 5-10), in which Jesus is portrayed as the One who fulfills Israel’s Old Testament holy days. In each case, Jesus precipitates a conflict with the Jewish religious leaders—which becomes the occasion for Jesus to verbalize and validate a claim about his true identity.

That’s what happens here. Jesus heals the man on the Sabbath, and this lands the man and him in trouble with the religious leaders (read and explain 5:10-16).

God commanded Israel to observe the Sabbath primarily to expression his compassion. As their Creator and Provider, he commanded his people to take a day of rest each week for themselves, their servants and their animals. This was both a gracious recognition of creaturely limitations and a way for them to express trust that God would meet their material needs.

But by the first century AD, Sabbath observance had become so neurotic and cruel that it completely reversed God’s intent for it. Religious Jews had become obsessed with what determining exactly it meant to “work.” In the Talmud, there are 39 classes of work forbidden on the Sabbath—redefining the meaning of “anal.”<sup>2</sup>

So by healing this man on the Sabbath and commanding him to carry his mat, Jesus was deliberately committing a double-violation of their Sabbath laws. Religious leaders viewed this as blasphemy against God—a capital offense.

Interestingly, Jesus does not defend himself (as he could have and did in Mk. 7) by pointing out their misapplication of the Old Testament Sabbath law. Instead, says he has the right to work on the Sabbath (and display God’s compassion) because he is God!

Read 5:17. The rabbis agreed that God could work on the Sabbath. “I have the authority to do the same thing because I am God’s Son.” To claim to be “the Son of God” was not some pantheistic platitude (“God is in all of us.”). To a monotheistic audience, this was a unique claim to share the same divine nature as God (read 5:18). This is even greater blasphemy! And so they (and we) can’t miss this claim, Jesus continues to elaborate on it in 5:19-29.

Read 5:19b,20. He claims to have *unique intimacy and working harmony with the Father*. Therefore, this healing has the Father’s approval in spite of their censure.

Read 5:21. He claims to be *able to bestow life* just like the Father (1 Sam. 2:6; Jn. 1:4). They have no authority to tell him when he can do this; he has the authority to do this for whomever he wishes.

Read 5:22. He claims to have *the authority to judge*—which belongs exclusively to God (Deut. 1:17). He is not under their judgment; they are under his judgment!

Read 5:23. He claims to have *the right to be honored* in the same way people honor the Father. Therefore, instead of persecuting him, they should be worshipping him!

In other words, this miracle is a “sign” because it reveals Jesus as God. “The only One who had the authority and power to heal this man on the Sabbath is God—and that is who I am!”

So what? So Jesus was either who he claimed to be (in which case our only fitting response is to embrace him as our Lord)—or he was a liar or insane (in which case we should completely reject him and warn others to do the same). The politically correct notion that he was a prophet or spiritual master or moral philosopher—and that therefore we can just tip our hats at him—is both irrational and immoral.<sup>3</sup> This is why Jesus said Matt. 12:30a (read). Once you understand Jesus’ claim, to refuse to bow to him and worship him as God is to reject him. What is your verdict?

But there is even more to this miracle. It is a “sign” that teaches us another wonderful lesson about Jesus. He is not only God who deserves your worship—he is also the Savior who is willing and able to restore you to spiritual life.

## The “Sign” – Jesus is willing & able to restore you to spiritual life

Jesus came into this multitude of broken people, he sought this man out in his hopeless physical condition, and he restored him to physical health when the man believed his word. But this healing is not an end in itself; it is a “sign” of Jesus’ offer to restore you to spiritual life if you believe his word.

This is why Jesus sought out the man again later and warned him that he was still in need of a far greater deliverance (read 5:14). Jesus is *not* saying: “God made you paralyzed once for some sin that you committed—so you’d better watch how or he’ll do it again!” He is saying: “It’s great that you are physically healed, but you have a far more serious problem. Your moral guilt will bring you justly under God’s judgment unless you get deliverance from this.” Like most of us, this man wanted only temporal solutions to his temporal problems. Jesus was warning him not to neglect his spiritual problem. Good advice for us . . .

This is why after saying 5:8,9 to the man, Jesus says 5:24,25 to all of us. Just as the man was healed the moment he responded in faith to Jesus’ word (“*immediately*”), so we receive eternal life the moment we respond in faith to Jesus’ word (“*has eternal life*”). “Eternal life” is a personal relationship with God (Jn. 17:3), and it begins now (not after you die)—the moment you put your faith in Jesus as the one who can make you well.

No matter how broken your life is, no matter how badly other people have treated you, no matter how many past attempts to fix you have failed, Jesus can radically heal you by restoring you to a love relationship with God. You will still have issues to deal with because we still live in fallen world—but Jesus will heal you at the most profound level, he will give you a new identity as his beloved child that puts hope in your heart, and he will initiate a healing process in every major area of your life.

Jesus asked this man “Do you wish to be well?” And he is asking you the same question: “Do you wish to be well?” Do you want to be restored to God today? All you have to do is admit that you are broken and cannot heal yourself, and tell Jesus that you believe he can make you alive to God.

## Footnotes

**1** Philip W. Comfort and Wendell C. Hawley, *Opening the Gospel of John* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1994), pp. 90,91.

**2** For example, you were allowed to pick up a chair and put it down somewhere else in your own home—but you weren't allowed to drag it because this might make a groove in the dirt floor and thus be "plowing. Women were forbidden to look in the mirror on the Sabbath, because they might discover a white hair and pluck it out—which was "reaping." You could dip a radish into salt, but not too long, for this would be to "make pickle." Sabbath laws also forbade healing sick people unless their sickness was life-threatening. In the area of "carrying," you couldn't carry anything heavier than a dried fig. If a man threw an object up with his right hand and caught it with his left hand, this was carrying. But if he threw it up and caught it in his mouth and ate it, it was not carrying because after being eaten the object no longer existed. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Book II, pp. 778-787.

**3** "There is no half-way house and there is no parallel in other religions. If you had gone to Buddha and asked him 'Are you the son of Bramah?' he would have said, 'My son, you are still in the vale of illusion.' If you had gone to Socrates and asked, 'Are you Zeus?' he would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Mohammed and asked, 'Are you Allah?' he would first have rent his clothes and then cut your head off . . . The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question . . . the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God, or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion which undermines the whole mind of man . . . We may note in passing that he was never regarded (by his contemporaries) as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met him. He produced mainly three effects - Hatred - Terror - Adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval." C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 157,158.