

Research on: the Man at the Pool of Bethesda

John 5:1-9

2 Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches.

“Called in the Hebrew tongue, Bethesda — That is, *the house of mercy; having five porticoes* — Piazzas, or covered walks, being a most agreeable and salutary building in those warm climates, where excessive heat was not only troublesome, but prejudicial to health. Probably the basin had five sides. *In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk* — The water being highly esteemed on account of some medicinal virtues which attended it, and the benefit many had received by bathing in it: *waiting for the moving of the water* — For an extraordinary commotion to be caused in it. *For an angel went down at a certain season* — Or, as some understand **κατα καιρον**, *at that season*, the season of the feast, mentioned John 5:1, confining the miracle of the pool to this particular feast” (Benson Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

“The sheep-market - This might have been rendered the "sheep-gate," or the gate through which the sheep were taken into the city for sacrifice. The marginal rendering is "gate," and the word "market" is not in the original, nor is a "sheep-market" mentioned in the Scriptures or in any of the Jewish writings. A "sheep-gate" is repeatedly mentioned by Nehemiah Neh 3:1, Nehemiah 3:32; Nehemiah 12:39, being that by which sheep and oxen were brought into the city. As these were brought mainly for sacrifice, the gate was doubtless near the temple, and near the present place which is shown as the pool of Bethesda.

“Bethesda - The house of mercy. It was so called on account of its strong healing properties - the property of restoring health to the sick and infirm.

“Five porches - The word "porch" commonly means a covered place surrounding a building, in which people can walk or sit in hot or wet weather. Here it probably means that there were five covered places, or apartments, in which the sick could remain, from each one of which they could have access to the water” (Barnes’ Notes, www.biblehub.com).

“In this century the pool described in John has been discovered and excavated in Jerusalem on the property of the White Fathers near St. Anne’s Church. The pool was trapezoidal in form, 165-220 feet wide by 315 feet long, divided by a central partition. There were colonnades on four sides and on the partition—thus, John’s ‘five porticoes.’ Stairways in the corners permitted descent into the pools” (AB John i-xii.207).

In this healing, it might have meant five covered areas where the sick could rest until the troubling of the water. *Could the five porches symbolize the five physical senses where man has made his bed?*

3 In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.

Impotent in Greek is *astheneo*, which means people who were “weak and feeble by long disease” (Thayer 80).

Halt is *cholos* and means “deprived of a foot, maimed, crippled” (Thayer 674).

Withered is *xeros* in Greek which means “shrunk, wasted, withered.” (Thayer 3583).

“of blind; these also may represent men a state of nature, who are ignorant of, and blind to everything that is spiritual; as to the true knowledge of God in Christ, the way of salvation by him, the plague of their own hearts, and the exceeding sinfulness of sin; to the Spirit of God, and his work upon the soul; and to the truths of the Gospel, in the power of them:

“halt, or "lame"; this word sometimes is used of persons in suspense about religious things, hesitating concerning them, halting between two opinions; and sometimes designs the infirmities of the saints, and their falterings in religious exercises; and here maybe expressive in a figurative way, of the incapacity natural men, to go or walk of themselves; as to come to Christ for grace and life, which no man can do, except the Father draw him; or to walk by faith in him.

“withered; one limb or another of them dried up: their arms or legs were withered, and their sinews shrunk, and were without radical moisture, or the free use of the animal spirits; and may point out carnal persons, such as are sensual, not having the Spirit, destitute of the grace of God, without faith, hope, love, knowledge, and the fear of God; without God, Christ, and the Spirit; and in a lifeless, helpless, hopeless, and perishing condition” (Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible, www.biblehub.com).

4 For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.

The water at certain times of the year was thought to have healing properties if it was agitated, perhaps by a spring bubbling up from underneath. This doesn’t mean an angel was seen by anyone, but perhaps the people could see the effects of something troubling the water, and then they would descend into it. The men who could descend into the water while it was agitated would be healed, not immediately, but over a period of time. This appeared to be superstition.

5 And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.

“And a certain man was there, who had been thirty and eight years in his infirmity. He had not lost all his powers - he crawled probably from some near home to the healing well; but for thirty-eight years he had been dragging out his impotent existence. The length implies the inveteracy of the disease. Hengstenberg, Wordsworth, Westcott, imply a marked correspondence between these thirty-eight years and the similar period of time during which Israel was compelled to wander in

the wilderness. It is not said how long the man had lain in the five porches waiting listlessly for healing, but that the malady was of old standing, and to all human appearance incurable” (Pulpit Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

“thirty and eight years—but not all that time at the pool. This was probably the most pitiable of all the cases, and therefore selected” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, www.biblehub.com).

Somehow this man had shattered his nervous system by a life of sensual indulgence and it manifested itself in some form of paralysis.

“Confinement to a bed for thirty-eight years would leave the sufferer so weak he would be unable to walk or even stand for any length of time. His case would be hopeless. Jesus selected for his attention the person who seemed most needy. Since he had been afflicted for thirty-eight years, he must have been well on in years. Jesus’ question must have seemed rather naïve to him.

Who would not want to be healed from utter helplessness? Yet the question also implies an appeal to the will, which the long years of discouragement may have paralyzed. Jesus thus challenged the man’s will to be cured” (EBC 9.62).

6 When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?

“Could anyone doubt that a sick man would like to be made whole, or that the patients came thither, and this man had returned again and again, just in hope of a cure? But our Lord asked the question, first, to fasten attention upon Himself; next, by making him detail his case, to deepen in him the feeling of entire helplessness; and further, by so singular a question, to beget in his desponding heart the hope of a cure” (Jamieson 3.380).

“The questioning of Jesus on this occasion involved an offer of mercy. **“Dost thou veritably wish** for health and strength?” The question implies a doubt. The man may have got so accustomed to his life of indolence and mendicancy as to regard deliverance from his apparent wretchedness, with all consequent responsibilities of work and energy and self-dependence, as a doubtful blessing. He whined out, with professional drawl, his oft-told story, reflecting very much upon his lovelessness and quarrelsomeness, and ugly temper. There are many who are not anxious for salvation, with all the demands it makes upon the life, with its summons to self-sacrifice and the repression of self-indulgence” (Pulpit Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

But Jesus really asking him, Do you want to recover, or are you mentally comfortable in this hospital environment, talking to your friends about the ills of the body, settled in the familiar routine? He is with many people who have decided to dwell mentally in a place where there is great resistance to healing and wholeness.

“This poor man, sick and impotent for eight and thirty years-many of which he had spent, as it would appear, day by day, wearily dragging his paralyzed limbs to the fountain with daily diminishing hope-this poor man attracts the regard of Christ when He enters, and He puts to him the strange question, ‘Wilt thou be made whole?’ Surely there was no need to ask that; but no doubt the many disappointments and the long years of waiting and of suffering had stamped apathy upon the sufferer’s face, and Christ saw that the first thing that was needed, in order that His healing power might have a point of contact in the man’s nature, was to kindle some little flicker of hope in him once more” (Ellicott’s Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

7 The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.

The man begins to make excuses and blame for not making it into the water – his friends did not help him, it wasn’t really his fault.

8 Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.

Jesus did not physically help the man up. What is required for the healing of a paralytic condition that had lasted practically a lifetime? He would have to leave his old way of thinking, his view of himself as a sinner, and see himself as the son of God.

Bed can be used as a metaphor for several states and stages of consciousness. Bed can represent birth, the sick-bed, sleep and apathy, the death-bed, lust and sensuality because all take place in bed. We are to take up our “bed,” our consciousness of life in matter, and walk. The bed no longer dominates us, because God has given His children dominion over the bed.

“Rise, take up ... - Jesus not only restored him to health, but he gave evidence to those around him that this was a real miracle. and that he was really healed. For almost 40 years he had been afflicted. He was not even able to walk. Jesus commanded him not only to "walk," but to take up his "bed" also, and carry that as proof that he was truly made whole. In regard to this we may observe,

1. That it was a remarkable command. The poor man had been sick for a long time, and it does not appear that he expected to be healed except by being put into the waters. Yet Jesus, when he gives a commandment, can give strength to obey it.
2. It is our business to obey the commands of Jesus, however feeble we feel ourselves to be. His grace will be sufficient for us, and his burden will be light” (Barnes, www.biblehub.com).

9 And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.

This healing of the man who had been ill for so long, required no recovery period, no recuperation, no physical therapy. Jesus spoke the word and immediately he was made whole and walked.

“the same day was the sabbath—Beyond all doubt this was intentional, as in so many other healings, in order that when opposition arose on this account men might be compelled to listen to His claims and His teaching” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, www.biblehub.com).