

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 6-26-11 AM NOTES  
"THE SAVIOR CONFRONTS THE RELIGIOUS SYSTEM"  
JOHN 5:1-16  
#17 in Series, "Verse-by-Verse Through John"

Religion—an institutionalized or personal system of beliefs and practices relating to the divine.

—Encarta Dictionary

I. The Pathetic Scene (vv. 1-4)

"What a pitiful crowd of broken humanity! It does not take much imagination to see those withered, wasted bodies, to smell the stench, to see the filth, and to sense the pathos of the old and young among that impotent, suffering humanity. It had to be a horrible, distressing sight—except for one thing—Jesus was there."

—Kent Hughes

A. Blind

**John 3:3 (NKJV)** "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

**2 Corinthians 4:4 (ESV)** "In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

B. Lame

**John 6:44 (NKJV)** "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day."

C. Paralyzed

**Romans 3:12b (NKJV)** "*There is none who does good, no, not one.*"

II. The Powerless Sinner (v. 5)

**Matthew 5:3 (NKJV)** "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

**Romans 3:10 (NKJV)** "*There is none righteous, no, not one.*"

*Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to Thy cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress,  
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly,  
Wash me, Savior, or I die!*

—Augustus Toplady (1775)

“What a dreadful inability sin brings with it! That simple command of the gospel, ‘Believe,’ the sinner cannot obey in himself. He can no more repent and believe without the Holy Spirit’s aid than he can create a world.”

—Charles Spurgeon

III. The Powerful Savior (vv. 6-9, 14)

**Romans 9:15 (NKJV)** *“I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.”*

A. His Compassion (vv. 6-7)

B. His Cure (vv. 8-9)

C. His Caution (v. 14)

**Deuteronomy 28:58-59 (NKJV)** <sup>58</sup>“If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, THE LORD YOUR GOD, <sup>59</sup>then the Lord will bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues--great and prolonged plagues--and serious and prolonged sicknesses.”

**1 Corinthians 11:30 (ESV)** “That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.”

IV. The Perverted System (vv. 10-16)

A. Their Legalism (vv. 10-13)

**Galatians 5:1 (NKJV)** “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”

**Mark 2:27 (NKJV)** “And He said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.’”

B. Their Intolerance (vv. 15-16)

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The Encarta Dictionary defines **religion** as **an institutionalized or personal system of beliefs and practices relating to the divine**. Using that definition, there is in one sense really only two religions in the world. Perhaps you would argue and say, "You must be joking; there are scores of different religions". That is true as to the **details** of different systems of belief in how man can be rightly related to the divine, but in another sense there are just two. The two are: 1) The religion of human works and merit, and 2) Biblical Christianity with its foundation of grace that teaches that no human being can be rightly related to God through their own works; those who are rightly related to God must come based on the merits of another – the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Chapters five through seven of John deal with the hostility of the Jewish religious system toward Jesus that swayed the nation's attitude toward Him from reservation to outright rejection. Judaism had been perverted and distorted from what God revealed in His written Word that we call the Old Testament. Over the years, man's traditions and rules and regulations designed to protect people from violating the law had been elevated to the same level as the Scriptures themselves. I will give more details and illustrations of this perversion of Judaism later in the message. The reason that the Jewish leaders turned against Jesus is that He largely ignored the traditions and rules added by man and kept emphasizing the written Word of God as the only authority. In addition to corrupting the authority source, some of the Jewish leaders had turned the sacrifices and feasts of Judaism into a business to basically extort money from the common people who were trying to obey the Scriptures, but in the way their religious leaders told them. We saw that abuse back in chapter two which led to Jesus cleansing the temple and chasing out the money changers and accusing the religious leaders of making the temple which was established as a house of prayer for all nations into what He called "a den of thieves". The two major groups that made up the religious leadership of the Jews were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. When Jesus rejected the traditions of man and the man added rules and regulations, He infuriated the Pharisees. When He confronted the dishonesty of turning obedience to the law into a money making proposition, He infuriated the Sadducees. Even though the Pharisees and the Sadducees didn't like one another, they united in the desire to destroy Jesus.

The episode that brings about Jesus' confrontation with the Jewish leaders is the third miracle that is recorded in John. In today's text Jesus heals a man who had been an invalid for 38 years. The timing of the healing is very important. Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath and that set off a firestorm of controversy.

#### I. The Pathetic Scene (V1-4)

We are not told which feast is referred to in verse one, but it was probably the feast of Pentecost which was 50 days after the Passover. In some translations, the last part of verse three and all of verse four is either left out or put in brackets. Why is this section missing or bracketed? In the oldest and most reliable manuscripts, this section is not there. There are thousands of Greek manuscripts or fragments of manuscripts and the way we arrive at the texts that are used for our English translations is that these old texts are compared with one another in painstaking and complex ways that show what was in the oldest most reliable manuscripts. As they compare the dated manuscripts, they have a basis from which they can determine what may have been added or left out of the text. Most of what was added was a copyist's note of explanation that eventually was brought into the text. That appears to be what the last part of verse three and all of verse four was. A copyist had put in an explanation of what the invalid meant when he said in **John 5:7 (NKJV)** "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." While the evidence is strong that the last part of verse three and verse four was not in the original, it is a helpful explanation of what the invalid man was

referring to. The Bible doesn't comment on this explanation in verse 4 of why the invalid people were at this pool. It was likely a superstition somewhat similar to supposed images of Mary that appear from such things as a stained glass church window when the sun shines in at a certain angle. People who make a pilgrimage to see the image often claim to be healed of diseases. The early church father, Tertullian in the late second or early third century referred to this as a superstition in Jesus' day about the angel stirring the water [MacArthur Commentary on John, Page 173].

What I want to focus on is not why the people were there but what Jesus did when He came there. There was a large group of pitiful people who evidently lived by this pool or at least stayed there during the day hoping to see the waters stirred and be the first one in the pool and thus be healed. In compassion, some had actually built five porches which were covered areas to keep some of the sun and rain off these pitiful people. Kent Hughes gives a graphic description of what we would likely have experienced had we been there on that day. "What a pitiful crowd of broken humanity! It does not take much imagination to see those withered, wasted bodies, to smell the stench, to see the filth, and to sense the pathos of the old and young among that impotent, suffering humanity. It had to be a horrible, distressing sight – except for one thing – Jesus was there" [Kent Hughes, "John, That You May Believe", Page 146].

I am not one who always looks for hidden symbolism in the Scriptures, but I can't help but see this physical scene as a picture of the spiritual condition of all mankind apart from Christ. Often in Scripture, the physical is used as a picture of the spiritual. Notice the description given in verse three.

#### A. Blind

Apart from Christ all mankind is spiritually blind. Jesus said in **John 3:3 (NKJV)** "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Why can the person who is not born again see the kingdom of God? It is because he is spiritually blind. **2 Corinthians 4:4 (ESV)** "In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." In the spiritual realm, all mankind – however intelligent, however moral or evil is spiritually blind. Unless God supernaturally gives them sight, they cannot see their own condition or see Jesus as God's only solution to sin's pollution.

#### B. Lame

Spiritually, those without Christ are so lame that they cannot make their way to Jesus on their own. That's why we read about Jesus saying in **John 6:44 (NKJV)** "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." To draw is the picture of tying a rope around someone and "drawing" them to Christ. No one comes to Jesus on their own – no one!

#### C. Paralyzed

The KJV translates this word "withered". It is a person who even when they know what to do, they are unable to do it. That is why we read in **Romans 3:12b (NKJV)** "*There is none who does good, no, not one.*" Because those who have not been born again are spiritually paralyzed, in slavery to sin, and have their will in bondage as Martin Luther described it, they cannot do what is required from just the Ten Commandments. Even when they outwardly obey the commandments to not commit adultery and not murder, they cannot avoid the lust or hating another person which Jesus says is adultery and murder.

## II. The Powerless Sinner (V5)

Let's move our focus from the crowd to the one man that Jesus focused on. We don't know how long this man had been coming to the pool at Bethesda, but we know that he had been in his physical condition for 38 years. The word "infirmity" is the Greek word for strength with a negative prefix. Let's go a little deeper in looking at the condition of the lost without Christ. I want you to see the absolute helplessness and thus the hopelessness of every sinner apart from Christ. This man is without strength and has a total inability to do anything about it. One of the first requirements to be saved, to be accepted by God is to admit our helplessness! As long as we think that we have merit or ability to earn acceptance by God, we cannot be saved. In the very first beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said in **Matthew 5:3 (NKJV)** "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." To be poor in spirit is to admit that we have no ability and no merit to deserve God's favor and acceptance. God declares in

**Romans 3:10 (NKJV)** *"There is none righteous, no, not one"*. Until a person admits their helplessness, they cannot be saved. The songwriter in Augustus Toplady wrote in 1775 these words that the church has sung for many years:

*Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to Thy cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress,  
Helpless, look to thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly,  
Wash me Savior or I die!*

This inability of man to merit salvation must be recognized and confessed before a person can be saved. The truth is that lost mankind has an inability to recognize their inability unless God enables them to see it. Charles Spurgeon put it this way: "What a dreadful inability sin brings with it! That simple command of the gospel, 'Believe,' the sinner cannot obey in himself. He can no more repent and believe without the Holy Spirit's aid than he can create a world" [Spurgeon Quote Book, Page 107]. There is an old saying that most people believe is found in the Bible. It says, "God helps those who help themselves". That is not in the Bible! In fact, the Bible teaches just the opposite: "God helps those who confess that they cannot help themselves!" When we realize that we are helpless, we are ready for God's help. Salvation is not rooted in the merit of man; it is rooted in the mercy of God.

We have seen the pathetic scene and the powerless sinner.

### III. The Powerful Savior (V6-9, 14)

There was a large multitude of people here at the pool of Bethesda, but Jesus helped only one. How do we explain that? We don't expect to say that God is sovereign. God says in **Romans 9:15 (NKJV)** *"I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."* There was nothing in this man that Jesus healed that would have motivated the Savior to show forth His power through him. It was simply that God chose this man for reasons known only to God to glorify Himself through this man.

#### A. His Compassion (V6-7)

We read nine times in the gospels where Jesus was moved to compassion. It was His compassion that brought Him to the pool of Bethesda. Why would Jesus ask this man the question, "Do you want to be made well?" It was to demonstrate that the man was hopeless and that the miracle was based on nothing in this man. The invalid's answer was not a simple "yes" or "no". In verse 7, he starts sharing the hopelessness of his situation. In other words he was saying, "Of course I want to be healed, but it is impossible". This invalid's crushed hopes had been in a superstition about an angel stirring up the water and the first one in got healed. Here is the point I want you to get. It was Jesus' compassion and sovereign choice that brought Him to this man; there was absolutely no faith or hope in this man for healing through Jesus. He didn't even know who Jesus was. The reason that I am making such a big deal about that is that there are some who teach that miracles of healing are always dependent on the faith of the one who is healed. They say if you pray to be healed and you are not, it is your own fault. Let me share a problem I have with the Word of Faith movement and their teaching that anyone who has enough faith can be healed. In addition to trying to usurp God's sovereignty, they subtly lay guilt trips on those who are suffering by implying that it is their own fault they are sick; it is because of their lack of faith. People who are desperate like those at the pool of Bethesda are open to so called "faith healers" because they are desperate to be healed. My heart breaks for those who stand in long screening lines at the healing services and give large offerings to the "healer" and look with false hope to a person spouting forth lies. My heart overflows with anger (righteous anger) toward those who would prey (not pray) on the most vulnerable of people and make promises that cannot be delivered and then blame it on the hurting person. The "healer" then drives away from the service in his luxury car to his elaborate home having dashed the hopes of the ill person once again. The power that healed this invalid was not his faith; it was the power of the Savior!

#### B. His Cure (V8-9)

Jesus can heal when there is faith and Jesus can heal where there is no faith. He is sovereign and He is all powerful. When Jesus speaks healing, it is instantaneous and it is complete. When He speaks, gnarled joints are brought to normal size and work smoothly. When He speaks, diseased, atrophied muscles are made perfect. When He speaks, paralyzed limbs begin to work as they were intended to work.

#### C. His Caution (V14)

It is a horrible injustice to sick people to say or insinuate that all sickness is directly tied to specific sin. It is also tragic to say that no sickness is tied to a specific sin. The language here seems to indicate that this man's sickness had something to do with his sin. We see examples of sin tied to sickness in both the Old and New Testaments. **Deuteronomy 28:58-59 (NKJV)** <sup>58</sup> "If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, THE LORD YOUR GOD, <sup>59</sup> then the Lord will bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues--great and prolonged plagues--and serious and prolonged sicknesses." In the New Testament, we see the same thing in the church of Corinth. **1 Corinthians 11:30 (ESV)** <sup>30</sup> "That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died." The context here is the sin of taking the Lord's Supper in a flippant, unworthy manner. Because of this sin, some were sick and some died. Jesus healed this man to make him holy! The same is true of spiritual healing. We are saved to be made holy. He never saved anyone to simply change their eternal destiny without a concern for their holiness. The Puritan Thomas Watson said it well: "We are elected to holiness, not for it".

#### IV. The Perverted System (V10-16)

Healing this invalid on the Sabbath was not an oversight on Christ Jesus' part. He knew exactly what He was doing. He was bringing to the surface the sin of the religious leaders in what they had done to God's precious law. This Sabbath healing pointed out two things about the religious leaders.

##### A. Their Legalism (V10-13)

Legalism is the false teaching that we can be right with God and please God by keeping rules and regulations that are in addition to the Scriptures. Legalism is called in Acts 15:10 "a yoke on the neck". Paul used that same language (yoke) for legalism in **Galatians 5:1 (NKJV)** "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." Let me show you what a heavy yoke it was. There were actually 39 series of laws that were in addition to Scripture that were instituted by Jewish Rabbis over the years to protect the Sabbath. There was ridiculous rule after rule designed to protect the Sabbath. While the Old Testament forbade working on the Sabbath, it did not specify what kind of work could not be done. It would seem to simply mean one's customary employment. The Israelites were not to participate in their normal work on the Sabbath. In other words the farmer ceased plowing and harvesting on the Sabbath. The carpenter ceased making tables and chairs on the Sabbath. The Jewish leaders had missed one very important point about the Sabbath. The Sabbath was not merely a rule for man to obey; the Sabbath was a gift from God to mankind. **Mark 2:27 (NKJV)** "And He [Jesus] said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.'" Here is what legalism does. It takes something good, something that was designed to help us and turns it into a heavy yoke around our neck. The Jewish leaders were so eaten up with legalism that they debated over whether a man with a wooden leg could walk out of the house on a Sabbath if the house was on fire because he would be guilty of carrying a burden on the Sabbath.

I want you to see that this tendency toward legalism is a tendency of man because it feeds human pride. Legalism allows us to supposedly earn God's favor and acceptance. That is why every false religion and every cult has one earning merit to gain acceptance by the divine (whatever their concept of God). We see even in evangelical churches this tendency to add rules and regulations that are not in Scripture to move from internal principles administered by the Holy Spirit to external rules and regulations.

##### B. Their Intolerance (V15-16)

Legalism always involves intolerance for those who do not keep the rules. It was this intolerance of the only One who completely kept God's written Word that eventually led to His crucifixion. Today, it is those who stand on God's written Word that experience the intolerance of the world.

## CONCLUSION

The central theme of this passage is the sovereignty, the power, and fearlessness of this one who is the Savior – Jesus Christ the Lord. He is sovereign over healing, over salvation, and over every other area (we will see much more evidence of this as we proceed in John). He is powerful to save, to heal, to do anything that is the will of the Father. He is fearless over those who would oppose Him – even to the point of facing death. Yet in His death we see the sovereignty of God in that His death on the cross procured salvation for all who would repent and believe on Him. (3343)