

A Sabbath Miracle – a Sabbath Problem

John 5:1-16

Reading: 1 John 1 (Chance)

Bethany Baptist Church

May 31, 2020

...pray...

Jesus went to the Jordan River to be **baptized** by John the Baptist.

He then picked **several disciples**.

He attended a **wedding in Cana** and turned **water to wine**.

He attended **Passover in Jerusalem** and turned **cash boxes** upside down.

Then He performed **miracles** which grabbed **headlines** but **few true followers**.

Jesus met with the **famous Jewish leader Nicodemus**: *“you must be born again!”*

He **preached** and **baptized** next door to the Baptizer, and **John’s followers fumed!**

He waited at **Jacob’s well** for an outcast Samaritan woman, and **revival** came to Sychar.

He returned to **Cana** and healed a **dying boy** ... in **Capernaum**.

During this time, perhaps as many as **eighteen months**, the Sanhedrin was tracking Jesus. Like a **hungry hawk** on a **winter phone pole**.

Perhaps they were at the **Jordan** when Jesus was baptized.

He stayed **under their radar** at the wedding: *“My time has not yet come.”*

But they were certainly there when He drove out the **temple money-changers**.

Nicodemus was one of them...at least for now.

They heard He was **preaching** and **baptizing** in Judea, and drawing big crowds.

And after His trip through **Samaria** (Sychar) and back to **Galilee** (official’s boy) ...

... Jesus again went **up to Jerusalem**. It was probably **October**, the **Feast of the Tabernacles**.

It was time for the Jesus to **step out** in the open. The **hawk** was watching.

But *who* was hunting *who*...?

Turn w/ me to John 5:1-16.

This morning's text is the beginning a **long account** that fills **chapter five**.

And **chapter five** begins a **new section** in the Gospel of John.

One in which we will see an **increasing conflict** between Jesus and the Sanhedrin.

But of course, John will keep his **focus on faith**, and what **kind** of *faith* is **saving faith**.

John's **pivotal story** begins like this:

Jesus *heals* a sinner and *picks* a fight.

(vv.1-9) A compassionate *healing*.

(vv.10-16) A hostile *response*.

If ever there was a place for *compassion*, it was at the pool of Bethesda...

1. Jesus returned to **Jerusalem**, probably for the **Feast of Tabernacles**.
 - a. I introduced our text by reviewing the **major events** of Jesus' **first many months** of public ministry (chap. 1 – 4).
 - b. Our account begins near the **Temple**, but in a place where **few scrupulous Jews** would wander. Who wants to be **unclean** for the **Sabbath**?
 - c. And contact with the *sick, blind, lame, and withered* would make you ritually **unclean**. ... But **Jesus** was there!
 - d. Our story begins w/ *a multitude of misery* and a *miracle for one*.

2. There was a **pool** in the **NE** section of **NT Jerusalem**, **north** of the **sheep gate, north** of the **Temple**.
 - a. The **sheep gate** was so-called because the *sacrificial sheep* were led through the *gate* and to the *temple*.
 - b. The *pool of Bethesda* (“House of Mercy” or “...Springs”) was really **two spring-fed pools**, side by side.
 - i. One *each side* of *each pool* was a *covered portico* (four), and a **fifth colonnaded area** between the *two pools*.
 - ii. Around those pools and in the shelter of those porticoes was a **miserable, moaning, mass** of men and women.
 - iii. They were there to be **healed**. Perhaps **more** arrived for the Feast, but a **multitude** was *always* there, *always* waiting...

- c. Because from time to time, the **waters of the pools** were **stirred**, perhaps by the **springs** that fed them.
 - i. **Vv.3&4** mentions an **angel**, but **that comment** was unlikely to have in **John's manuscript**.
 - 1. It **doesn't** show up in the **earliest copies**.
 - 2. It uses **words** that are **out of place** in John's writing.
 - 3. So take that comment with a **grain of salt**.
 - ii. But **v.7** **does** say that from time to time, the waters were **stirred**.
 - 1. And the context is clear: **whatever** moved them, the **first one** in was *healed*. ... But **not** the *second*...
 - d. The **pool of Bethesda** was *home* to a **miserable, desperate multitude**.
3. **And there was Jesus!**
- a. It was almost as if He were **looking** for someone; there to keep some **divine appointment**.
 - b. He fastened His eyes on one **desperate, grouchy old man**. And Jesus **knew** this man had been **helplessly sick** for a **very long time**...
 - c. **Thirty eight years**. He'd been "*in his sickness*" nearly **four decades**.
 - i. Most people in Jesus's day **hardly lived** to be **40!**
 - ii. But I'd guess his **age** to be somewhere between **50–60**. An **old man**. A **sick, hardened old man**.

- d. Jesus asked him what first appears to be the *obvious*(6): “Do you wish to get well?”
- i. Jesus’ wasn’t one to **waste words**. After all, Jesus could have simply **healed** the man (*w/o a word or touch*) and moved on.
 - ii. This was a **loving offer...** Perhaps an opportunity for the man to **humbly** ask for help (“*God gives grace to the humble*”).
- e. But what Jesus **heard** was this: **read v.7.**
- i. **D.A. Carson** says the man is so **unaware** of what Jesus is offering that what we have here is a **grouchy old man** who thinks he’s **answering a stupid question**.
 - ii. In fact, there is **nothing** very good about this man in this story.
 - iii. But you **do** have to **feel** for him a *little...* Put yourself in **his place**. **Thirty-eight** years of illness. Perhaps many years, laying by that **pool**, putting all your **hope** in an **unlikely miracle**.
 1. **How often** did those waters *stir*? *Monthly? Weekly? Once per feast?*
 2. Can you imagine **years of trying, and failing**, to **drag yourself into that pool** before **anyone else in the crowd** made it?
 3. Apparently with **no family** or **friends** (“*I have no man*”).
 4. Can you picture trying to secure the **choice places** to lay on your pallet (near the pool)?
 5. Can you understand that **every other sick person** around that pool becomes your **competitor...your enemy**?

- f. It was another **short conversation**. Jesus spoke only **two** short sentences: “*Do you wish to get well?*” and “*Get up, pick up your pallet and walk*”
- i. **Short**, but *intensely powerful*. Jesus essentially lined-out **three** terse commands: *get up, pick up, get going*.
 - ii. And “***immediately***” (rare w/John), the man became **well** – *permanently*.
 - iii. And **w/o** so much as a ***thank you***, the grouchy old man *got up, picked up, and got going*.

And (13) Jesus melted into the moaning, miserable crowds.

Sabbath! What a great day for a *miracle*! But instead of *worship*, Jesus got *persecution*. Read v.8-16.

1. The **Sabbath** – the **seventh** day of the week – was set aside under the **Mosaic Law** as a day of rest, influenced by **God’s seventh day rest** at the end of the **week of creation** (Gen. 1).
 - a. **Exodus 20:8-11** – “Remember the **Sabbath day** to keep it holy. **Six days** you shall labor and do all your work, but the **seventh day** is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall **not** do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in **six days** the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and **rested on the seventh day**; therefore the LORD blessed the **Sabbath day** and made it holy.”
 - b. The command to “**not do any work**” was originally understood to mean resting from your **ordinary vocation**:
 - i. The *carpenter* stayed out of his shop, the *farmer* out of his fields, the *merchant* out his store.
 - c. But by the **1st** century, the Pharisees had constructed an **enormous superstructure** of picky **rules** and **regulations** on top of the Law.
 - i. **Hundred** more “*Thou shalt*” and “*Thou shalt not*.”
 - ii. Incl. **39 categories of work** that were **forbidden on Sabbath**.
 - d. So when the man **walked away** from the *pool*, **carrying** his *pallet*, on a **Sabbath**, the Jews *pounced*!
 - i. Pretty soon, we’re witnessing a **controversy** in the *streets*, a **command** in the *Temple*, and a looming **confrontation** with the *Jews*.

2. I had to notice that even though Jerusalem was **filled with worshippers** for the Feast, the Jews *picked* this one old man **out of the crowds (10)**, *carrying* his pallet! Their **antennas** were out! This was *serious* to them...!
 - a. **V.10-“It is the Sabbath, it is not lawful for you to carry your pallet.”**
 - b. But, again, to be **completely correct**, *carrying your pallet on Sabbath* was **not forbidden** in the Mosaic Law.
 - i. As we said, the Law’s **point** was that you were **not** to work at your **vocation** – like a *tradesman* or a *herdsman*.
 - c. Maybe the man could have said – “*sorry.*” Or said – *nothing*. But instead (11) he **blamed** the One who had just “*made him well.*”
 - d. His answer **didn’t send them away**. “*Who is this Man who ordered you to pick-up your bed and walk on the Sabbath!?!*”
 - i. Did you notice the Jews **never comment** on the fact this poor man’s been **healed** – never **congratulate** him or **praise** God?
 - ii. What kind of “**holiness**” doesn’t **rejoice** in **mercy...?**
 - e. But the man couldn’t have **picked Jesus out of a line-up**, because Jesus had **melted into the miserable pool Bethesda crowd**.
3. The Jews **leave** and soon Jesus **returns**. They are in the **temple precincts**, not far from the site of the man’s healing.
 - a. Now we overhear Jesus’ **second conversation** with the man. Again, it’s a **brief conversation**, and it’s a **forceful command**:
 - b. “*Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.*”

- c. The Bible teaches (OT/NT) that **your sin** can be the cause of **your sickness**.
 - i. **Psa 32** (David): When I kept silent *about my sin*, **my body wasted away** through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; **my vitality was drained away** *as* with the **fever heat of summer**.
 - ii. Jesus seems to be calling this man to **repent** from a **sinful life** that was the **root** of his **infirmity**
 - iii. But I think it could **also be** that Jesus was **warning** him against the **ungratefulness & disloyalty** that is about to **overtake him!**
 - d. But he **just didn't get it!** He **left** Jesus, **left** the temple, and made a **bee-line** to the Jews! He **ID'd** the One who had **healed** him to the **hypocrites** who cared nothing for him.
 - i. Jesus **healed** him; he **flipped** on Jesus!
 - ii. **Leon Morris** dryly comments: "*The man was **not** the stuff of which **heroes** are made.*"
4. But you also need to understand this **healing** and **betrayal** and the **coming confrontation** through the lens of **God's sovereignty**
- a. Jesus **knew** this was coming. He **knew** the man at the *pool* & in the *temple*. He **knew** the man was *unrepentant* (**OBTW**, God will heal **sinful people** if it serves His **purpose**). Jesus knew this **pitiful man** would *betray Him...*
 - b. Jesus was **setting the stage** to call the Jewish **elite** to *accounts* and the **sinful nation** to *repentance*.
 - i. And **Sabbath rules** would often be the *point of contention*.
 - c. And so in response, the Jews **repeatedly persecuted** (Gr. imperfect) our Lord.
 - d. They **did not relent** until they had **nailed Him** to the **cross...**

But for now, Lord Jesus is about to *rock their world*, with *claims of deity* and an appeal to a force of *witnesses*!

We'll begin to **unpack** that **next Lord's Day**.

The story is just beginning, but we need to underline two truths we've already seen.

1. ***First truth: The authority of Jesus.***
 - a. Seen in what He **knew**. In His power to **heal**. In His **command to repent**. In launching His **confrontation** with the Sanhedrin.
 - b. His ongoing **accusation** would be their **legalism** and **hypocrisy**.
2. ***Second truth: The nature of saving faith.*** John loves the theme of *faith*. But today we've witnessed a **negative example**.
 - a. Jesus picked this **one** man out of a **vast crowd** and **healed** him – *immediately and completely*.
 - b. In the return, the man **didn't** *thank* Jesus or *praise* God, instead he **betrayed** Jesus to **protect** himself.
 - c. MacArthur writes: *This has to be one of the greatest acts of ingratitude and obstinate unbelief in Scripture.*
 - d. Which would make this guy a **Jr. Varsity Judas Iscariot!**
 - e. Being **saved** is **not proved** by God doing you a **big favor** (*miracle*). It's proved by a faith that **repents** and remains **loyal**.
 - f. You need a **faith** that **runs to Jesus**, and **not** to His **enemies**.
 - g. So let's close by **re-reading** Jesus' **last words** to a man who had every reason/opportunity to **believe** (14): "*Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.*" **2X**
 - h. What could be **worse** than **38 years** of *lying by that pool*...?
 - i. Spending **eternity** in **hell**. **Come to Christ.** *...pray...*