

“Total Inability”
John 5:1-9
(Preached at Trinity, August 22, 2018)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Chapter 4** Jesus departed from Samaria and entered Galilee arriving at Cana, the place where He turned the water into wine.
As we enter **Chapter 5** Jesus is on the move again. He has departed from Cana and has arrived at Jerusalem. There is no mention of His disciples.
At one of the Temple gates called the sheep-gate was a pool known as the Pool of Bethesda. (The TR reads Βηθεσδα. The NA28 reads Βηθζαθα – Bethzatha)
2. The pool was surrounded by many who were “sick, blind, lame, and withered.”
We are to see the terrible extent of their condition. The word “withered” literally means “dry.” It described a plant that has shriveled up due to a lack of moisture.
Our focus is directed to a particular man, paralyzed and helpless. He was all but dead.
3. There are differences of opinion regarding the supernatural aspect of the pool.
 - a. The last part of **Verse 3** and **Verse 4** are included in the TR but not the NA28. Most modern Bibles will have a note: *Early mss do not contain the remainder of v 3, nor v 4.*
I think we too often easily dismiss this today. There are modern expositors who will toss this passage as well as others without considering the weight of history. “All the Christian Fathers, such as Tertullian, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Cyril, Augustine, hold the reading as genuine.”¹
 - b. Without this portion we have no understanding of the phrase in **Verse 7** – “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.”
 - c. William Hendriksen writes: “it is certainly true that *the possibility* of supernatural, angelic activity must not be ruled out. It should never be forgotten that an interpolation from the margin into the text *may be correct*. In the days of our Lord’s earthly ministry angels come into prominence again and again, and unusual powers and energies play an important role.”²
 - d. Regardless of any supernatural healing qualities in this pool, the healing of this lame man was entirely the work of Christ. In fact, there is no mention of the water being involved at all in the healing of this lame man who was totally unable to help himself.

¹ John J. Owen, *A Commentary, Critical, Expository, and Practical, on the Gospel of John*, (New York: Leavitt & Allen, 1861), 90.

² William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 1:191.

6. Tonight I want to set this before you as a type or example of the doctrine known as Total Depravity. It is the “T” of the “TULIP” or what is called the “Five Points of Calvinism.”
- I. The extent of his helplessness
 - II. The necessity of Divine intervention -
 - III. The balance of human responsibility - "Do you wish to get well?"
- I. The extent of his helplessness
- A. The man is described as totally helpless
 1. **Verse 5** says he had been “ill” for 38 years. The word for ill refers to weakness or disease. This is an understatement since he was completely unable to move towards the water. He was completely helpless.
 - a. He could not help himself. He couldn’t walk. He couldn’t roll. He couldn’t drag himself. Whatever the nature of his illness, it left him in a state of paralysis.
 - b. He had no one who could help him move towards the water
 - c. He was withered like the shriveled up plant in the desert. You can picture atrophied limbs from 40 years of inactivity.
 2. In **Verse 6** we read he had been in that condition “a long time.” That too is an understatement. It would reasonable to conclude he had been in that condition his entire life.
 - B. The extent of our helpless spiritual condition is far worse. We are described as dead in sin.
 1. All human beings are born spiritually dead
Romans 5:12 – “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:”
Ephesians 2:1 NAU - "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,"
 2. Total depravity describes total inability. Depravity has affected every dimension of the human being
 - a. Total depravity is not a description of our wickedness, although our wickedness is the fruit of our fallen condition. Total depravity doesn’t mean we are totally without any good. Human beings are capable of great acts of kindness. Total depravity is referring to our total inability to any spiritual good that would lead to our salvation.
 - b. Total depravity means the lost man is affected in every element of his being.
 He is depraved in his heart. The heart is the center of our being and affections
John 3:19 NAU - "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil."
 - c. He is depraved in his mind – He cannot think clearly about God.
Romans 1:28 NAU - "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,"
 Satan has blinded the minds of the unbelieving

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 NAU - "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

Ephesians 4:18 NAU - "being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;"

- d. He is depraved in his conscience - He cannot perceive the reality of his own corruptions nor the seriousness of his sin. He establishes his own law of right and wrong. He cannot comprehend his guilt before the Judge of all the earth.
 - e. He is depraved in his will – even if he comes to see the danger of his sinfulness he doesn't possess the will to live righteously and doesn't possess the will to turn to Christ properly
Luther refers to it as the "Bondage of the Will"
3. Our condition is that of total helplessness. We are blind, lame, and paralyzed.
Romans 5:6 NAU - "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly."

II. The sovereignty of God in our deliverance

- A. This man alone attracted the attention of Christ
 1. **Verse 3** describes a "multitude" of people laying by the pool
 2. Jesus could have come to the pool and healed the multitude.
Instead this single man was approached by Jesus. We are not told he was any different from the others. We are not told he cried out to Christ. This man was singled out from the crowd. It was all by sovereign grace.
- B. God is capable of redeeming the entirety of mankind
 1. There is nothing lacking in God's ability
There is nothing lacking in the sufficiency of Christ's atonement.
The issue isn't the sufficiency but the design
 2. God sovereignly chose to give mercy to His elect while leaving the rest to His justice. No one is treated unjustly. God can never be accused of injustice.
 3. It is by God's sovereign mercy.
John 5:21 NAU - "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes."
- C. And notice the necessity of Divine intervention -
 1. The man had been lame for 38 years. Had Christ not come to Him particularly he would have remained lame for the next 38 years.
The man was completely helpless.
 2. Regarding the salvation of man, unless God does something supernatural all men will continue in their lost condition
 - a. We cannot help ourselves
Jeremiah 13:23 NAU - "Can the Ethiopian change his skin
Or the leopard his spots? *Then* you also can do good
Who are accustomed to doing evil."

- b. No one else is able to help us.
The man told Jesus, “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool”
- 3. Jesus confirmed our total inability:
John 6:44 NAU - "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day."
- 4. Something has to be done to us that is supernatural. We need a powerful deliverance. God did this for us.
A. W. Pink – “You, too, were lying amid the “great multitude of impotent folk,” for by nature you were a child of wrath, “even as others” (Eph. 2:3). Yes, you were lying in all the abject misery of a fallen creature—blind, halt, withered—unable to do a thing for yourself. Such was your awful state when the Lord, in sovereign grace, drew near to you. O thank Him now that He did not pass you by and leave you to the doom you so richly deserved. Praise Him with a loud voice for His distinguishing grace that singled *you* out to be an object of His sovereign mercy.”³
- 5. Notice the immediate healing of the man.
John 5:9 NAU - "Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and *began* to walk."
a. A man who hadn’t walked for almost 4 decades suddenly became whole. He arose and walked. He didn’t need to go through rehab. He didn’t have to learn to walk. He was completely restored.
b. When God visits us with salvation we are transformed immediately. We are growing in holiness but we fully restored in Christ.

III. The balance of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility

- A. Jesus approached the man in his helpless estate and then asked him "Do you wish to get well?"
 - 1. The man saw his condition – he was paralyzed
 - 2. He knew he could do nothing to help himself
 - 3. He looked to Christ
 - 4. In **Verse 7** we read the man refers to Jesus as “Sir.” The word used is κύριος. The translation “Sir” is permissible, especially in the vocative case. But the most frequent translation of this word is Lord. Whether we translate it “Sir” or “Lord” there is a high tone of reverence being expressed.
 - 5. The lame man knew no one else could help him and he looked to Christ. John Owen – “His reply, while it is almost one of despair, shows that he had no hope or expectation of any other mode of restoration to health, than the one here afforded.”⁴

³ Arthur Walkington Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1923–1945), 248.

⁴ John J. Owen, *A Commentary, Critical, Expository, and Practical, on the Gospel of John*, (New York: Leavitt & Allen, 1861), 93.

- B. The Gospel goes forth to all men and all are commanded to believe.
1. We never diminish the sovereignty of God in salvation. Salvation is all of God. God chose us in eternity. He sent forth Christ to atone for our sins. He sent forth the Holy Spirit to enable us to repent and believe and He effectually applied the Gospel to us. Salvation is of the Lord.
 2. But the Gospel is offered to all men.
The question of Jesus goes forth to all men – “Do you wish to get well?”
 - a. Who could imagine someone turning down God’s healing? But most do.
 - b. Not only is the question asked. The Gospel is presented as a command. Both faith and repentance are presented in Scripture as commands
 3. The Gospel is to always be presented as a command—something to be obeyed.
Romans 6:17 NAU - "But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,"
- C. God makes great promises for those who trust the Gospel
1. While we are great sinners God has sent forth His Son to redeem those who trust in His righteousness and follow Him as Lord.
John 3:16 NAU - "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."
 2. If we trust Jesus Christ we will be saved
Romans 10:9 NAU - "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;"

Conclusion:

1. The Pool of Bethesda teaches the utter helplessness of fallen humanity. We are paralyzed in our sin.
2. But as a merciful Savior, Christ comes to us and sovereignly calls us to salvation.
3. But it is doesn’t rule out human responsibility.
There are two things equally true about the Gospel.
 1. God has elected some to salvation and left the rest to perish in their sin.
 2. Anyone who wishes to be saved can be saved.
4. Do not be deluded into thinking you can do nothing and somehow it will all work out OK in the end. God has commanded you to trust Jesus Christ. He has commanded you to surrender your life to Him. The day will come when you will stand before Him and He will require you to give account for your life.
5. God commands you to look to Christ and trust Him.
Isaiah 45:22 – “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there is none else.*”
6. This is the verse through which Charles Spurgeon was saved. He heeded the call and found Christ glorious. Will you obey God and turn to Jesus?
Romans 10:13 – “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”