

Exegetical Notes, John 5:1-18
“Do You Want to Get Well?”

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John 5:1-18

Verses 1-6

Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. ² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.

^[4] ⁵ One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

- Sometime after healing the man’s son in Cana, Jesus returned south to Jerusalem. There, at the sheep gate near the pool called Bethesda, protective canopies had been built to protect the sick who came to the pool for healing. Apparently the pool was fed by a spring. Occasionally bubbles came up and disturbed the surface of the water. The people believed that this disturbance was caused by the touch of angel’s wings. They believed that the first person to touch the water after such a disturbance would be healed.
- Jesus noticed a man there who had been an invalid for 38 years. His condition is not known but the text implies that it was the result of some accident or illness. He was not born an invalid.
- Jesus asked the man if he truly wanted to get well. Many beggars came to the pool because it was near the Sheep Gate through which many people entered and left the city. These folks were there to make a living, not to be healed. Jesus’ question was designed to determine if this man was really interested in being cured or if he had accepted his condition and was making the most of it.

Verse 7

“Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

- The man's answer to Jesus' question indicates that he was there seeking to be healed, but his condition made it impossible for him to get to the water first.

Verses 8-9a

Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."⁹ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

- Jesus healed the man telling him to pick up his mat and go home.

Verses 9b-13

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath,¹⁰ and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."¹¹ But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'¹² So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?"¹³ The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

- The healing happened on the Sabbath day. Jews were forbidden to "work" on the Sabbath. Carrying a mat was considered work by the rabbis. So, the man who was healed broke the Sabbath Laws by carrying his mat. By telling the man to carry his mat, Jesus had instructed the man to break the law. Thus, the man was guilty of breaking the law, and Jesus was proven a false teacher because he had told the man to do what was not legal in the eyes of the Jewish leaders.
- The man justified his action by saying that Jesus, the man who healed him had told him to carry his mat. The leaders wanted to know the name of the man who had encouraged him to break the law. But the healed man did not know who it was that had healed him. He did not even know Jesus' name.

Verses 14-15

Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

- Later, in the Temple, Jesus returned to the man he had healed. He admonished the man to change his life style. Jesus warned the man that if he continued to live as he had been living, he was likely to experience worse than he had already known.
- The man went to the authorities and reported to them that it was Jesus who had healed him and told him to carry his mat on the Sabbath day.

Verses 16-18

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him.¹⁷ In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.”¹⁸ For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

- Jesus had proven to the religious leaders that he was an unfit teacher because he had healed the man on the Sabbath. Nothing would ever change their minds. They confronted Jesus with the intention of showing his obvious error to everyone.
- Jesus compounded the “error” by referring to God as his Father, implying that he had an intimate and special relationship with God.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermons entitled *Do You Want to Get Well?* They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship* & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)