

Session 9

April 26, 2020

Unit 2: Jesus Encounters . . .

The Man at the Pool of Bethesda

As Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus heals both physically and spiritually.

The Word

John 5:1-15

Session Outcome

To understand that we must seek God's healing in all areas of our lives.

Discover:

Illustrated Bible Life explores the history and archaeology of the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem, and provides verse-by-verse commentary on the Scripture passage.

Last Week:

We learned the dangers of how misplaced attitudes and motives can affect our worship of God.

This Week:

We will learn that God's concern extends to all the areas of our lives, and we should seek healing for all things—physical, mental, as well as spiritual.

Listen:

This week's Illustrated Bible Life podcast on FoundryLeader.com takes a look at the pool where Jesus healed a disabled man.

Discover:

Near the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem, Jesus healed a man who had been disabled for 38 years. This pool has a long and interesting history as a place of healing, but throughout much of

Christian history, no trace of it could be found. Then, in the 19th century, archaeologists began excavating an area that fit John's description of the pool. Discover more about this fascinating place in this week's Illustrated Bible Life article, "The Pool of Bethesda."

Engage the Word

How busy Jesus is! In chapter 2 Jesus attended a wedding where He provided a first "sign." An evening conversation with the Pharisee Nicodemus provides the most quoted verse of the New Testament, John 3:16. Chapter 4 reports an encounter with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in Samaria. This led her to faith in Jesus as "Messiah." Through her influence many Samaritans believed in Jesus, declaring Him the "Savior of the world." Jesus then healed the son of a "royal official" at Capernaum, a healing John called "the second sign." Today's session examines another healing miracle, though now back in Jerusalem.

TROUBLED LIVES

John 5:1-6

What Jewish festival brought Jesus to Jerusalem? It could have been one of several important occasions. John tells us only that Jesus "went up" to the city (see the brief treatment of "up to Jerusalem" in the previous week's session). The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) report only one trip by Jesus, as an adult, to Jerusalem. John includes several such journeys by the adult Jesus. The most common occasions for the trip would have been Passover/Unleavened Bread, Pentecost and Tabernacles.

A public pool provides the setting for a healing miracle. John seems to assume his readers may not have been all that familiar with Jerusalem and so he provides the location name both in Greek (translated "Sheep Gate") and Aramaic ("Bethesda"). The Sheep Gate was located north of the temple. Animals went through this area on their way to the temple courts for possible sacrifice. The place held a special attraction for many people with disabilities hoping for a miracle. John reports that one of these troubled souls had been a disabled person for "thirty-eight years." The large amount of time this man had waited for healing would no doubt have made the ensuing miracle even more impressive.

Jesus did not just that day learn that the man had been in this physical condition for a long time. Rather the text suggests Jesus "knew" ? this. How did Jesus "know"? This may be one of several times in John's gospel where Jesus operates close to the divine aspects of His person. Or maybe John is affirming the intuitive strength of Jesus. John also adds a sense of "you are there" to the reader by using a present tense verb (which can be translated Jesus "says" to the man). Jesus challenged the man's resolve by asking a "yes/no" question: "Do you want to get well?" By this, Jesus would clarify the man's desire. What would the answer be?

"TROUBLED" WATER?

John 5:7-9

The man did not answer Jesus' question, but instead offered a reason, or maybe an excuse, as to why he was still there day after day, not healed. Perhaps he thought that healing was only in the pool. Being slow to get to the water, he explained, meant someone always got in ahead of him. Jesus replied to the man's objection with a series of commands. Three consecutive imperative verbs convey Jesus' demand to the man—"Get up! Pick up...walk." Jesus moved past the man's excuses. The healing was immediate. Obeying Jesus' command, healing touched the long-term disabled person both physically and in his inner person. He "began walking" ? because he believed Jesus' words. He didn't need an angel to stir the water so healing could happen (an apparent local tradition found in some early New Testament manuscripts). The Healer himself was present. Jesus could do, would do, more than any angel. Almost seeming to be an afterthought, John wrote that this healing came on the Sabbath. But this key point became a troublesome aspect of the case against Jesus. He seemed willing to violate Sabbath rules when genuine human need was present. Many Jewish leaders found this highly offensive and began planning to find ways to stop Him.

TROUBLED JEWISH LEADERS

John 5:10-15

The religious leaders ("the Jews") quickly challenged the man because he was carrying his mat. To these leaders this looked like a clear transgression about working on the Sabbath. The prohibition of carrying one's mat was one of hundreds of created rules added to the scriptures by tradition and over time. These were meant to insure people did not violate the Sabbath. This transforming miracle meant the former disabled now walked! Rather than celebrate with him, the local Jewish religious leaders challenged the man as a lawbreaker and plotted to silence Jesus. The man defended his actions, saying he was obeying the one who had healed him. Jesus' commands were justification enough to the man to walk and carry, even on the Sabbath. The healed man did not know who it was who had brought this healing to him. Indeed, he "had no idea" and Jesus had already moved on to another place.

The story of the healed man and Jesus continues at the temple, where Jesus found him a little later. Jesus is the pursuing Savior. Note who found who. Jesus sought the man. The Lord added a brief word of encouragement, also one of warning. He called the man to live a changed life, to "stop sinning." Here Jesus expressed interest in healing that is spiritual as well as physical. The healed man reported to the Jewish leaders that Jesus was his healer. Trouble for Jesus increased. Persecution, and death threats, began to follow Him. Incredibly, an act of mercy, this deed of power marked Jesus in the minds of some, as a danger. Trouble loomed for the Savior.

Did You Know?

Jesus offered spiritual wholeness, but He did not guarantee a life exempt from physical problems. What are some biblical characters who are examples of this? People who had strong faith, but still had illness and medical issues?

Think About It

Sometimes people become comfortable in their pain, sorrow, or hurts. Jesus' question is legitimate: Do we really want to be healed and set free? Based on this passage, healing requires us to be open to something different. For this man, being healed changed the pattern of life he had known for 38 years. Are we open to the kind of dramatic change Christ's touch would bring?

Reflect

In what ways can we tell others of the spiritual healing we have received from God?

Rick Williamson

Discussion Guide

Insight

The command against specific forms of labor, such as carrying one's mat, was not a commandment from God, but rather a guideline enforced by religious leaders to safeguard the keeping of the Sabbath. Sabbath obedience was central largely because some Jewish teachers affirmed and taught that a faultless keeping of the Sabbath by the entire Jewish people would usher in the arrival of the Messiah.

Connect to My Experience

Share a time you felt powerless or hopeless.

What did it feel like to be powerless, even if only for a season? What were some of the most frustrating elements of that time?

Some respond to powerlessness with anger while some become passive and apathetic. Silently consider where you fall on that scale.

Discuss the ways the experience of powerlessness, real or perceived, manifests itself in our lives.

Transition:

In this story, a man has been disabled for many years. He feels trapped by circumstances beyond his control. Jesus bursts onto the scene and heals the man, instructing him to get up and walk. The man is invited to new life, both physically and spiritually. The scene takes place on the Sabbath, stirring up anger amongst the Jewish leaders, revealing once again their hardened hearts and blinded eyes.

Connect to the Word

Invite someone to read John 5:1-6, then discuss the following,

Jesus is in Jerusalem once again for the celebration of a religious festival. During His time in the city, He encounters a great number of people with physical ailments, gathered around a pool. Jesus approaches one individual from among the crowd of disabled, one who had been disabled for many, many years and asks Him an unexpected question, “Do you want to get well?”

Jesus focused His entire attention on one man when there was an entire crowd of people in need of healing. Why might Jesus have approached this man in particular?

Of all the questions Jesus could have asked, He asks the man if he wants to get well. What might Jesus’ question reveal about the state of the man’s heart and mind?

Invite someone to read John 5:7-9, then discuss the following,

Unexpectedly, the man does not express a desire to get well, nor does he deny it. Instead, he offers an explanation of his situation. Perhaps he does not know Jesus or His reputation as the healer. The man’s response seems to indicate a deeply engrained sense of powerlessness as he cites others’ behavior as the reason for his continued status. Unhindered by the man’s response, Jesus issues a three-fold command: Stand up, take your mat, and walk. The man is healed, but perhaps just as surprising is the man’s response: immediate obedience to Jesus’ command.

What did the man’s initial response to Jesus’ question reveal?

Jesus does not engage with the man’s explanations, but instead takes action to heal. What does Jesus’ decisive action reveal about Jesus’ power and God’s redemptive intentions?

Only after the healing does the gospel writer reveal that the healing takes place on the Sabbath. Jesus knew that both His behavior and command to the man would cause conflict with the Jewish leaders.

Why did He proceed? Why not simply come back and heal the man the next day?

What might Jesus be implicitly declaring with His behavior?

Invite someone to read John 5:10-15, then discuss the following,

After following Jesus’ command, the healed man is confronted by Jewish leaders who take issue with the man’s behavior, specifically his carrying of his mat on the Sabbath.

The leaders are so distracted by Jesus’ command to “take up your mat and walk,” they miss (or ignore) the fact that Jesus made the man well. What does their narrow-minded focus reveal about the state of their hearts?

Is there a danger for the church to lose focus on what’s important? If so, in what ways? After the healed man’s encounter with the leaders, Jesus pursues him and confronts him. He

reminds the man that he has been freed from his physical ailment; now he must leave off sinning and be free from his spiritual bondage.

What does Jesus' holistic concern for the man's well-being demonstrate about His desire for the man, and for all God's children?

While the text is not clear about the man's response to Jesus' call to leave off sinning, we learn he reports to the leaders that it was Jesus who healed him. After this report, the Jewish leaders began to persecute Jesus (John 5:16).

Why might the man have responded to Jesus' command in this way?
In what ways might our testimony of what God has done, or is doing, in our lives result in persecution?

Connect to My Life and the World

Each one of us is familiar with the experience of powerlessness and brokenness in our own way. Some face the challenge of chronic illness or pain; others carry the weight of depression or anxiety. Some of us bear the heavy burden of past regret and sin, some of which still bear consequences in our daily lives. We can trust God's redemptive, restorative intentions for our lives. We are invited to lay aside fear, apathy, bitterness, and anger and instead allow the Holy Spirit to empower us to grow in Christlikeness. Obedience to Christ is the only path to wholeness and freedom.

In today's story, Jesus acts on behalf of both the man's physical needs and spiritual needs. What does this demonstrate about the heart of God towards us as holistic beings—mind, body, and spirit?

The man had laid by the pool for 38 years. Healing introduced a completely new way of being in the world.

Consider what would change in your life if you surrendered yourself to God's will and way. While one man was healed, dozens remained unhealed that day. While that is not the outcome we would prefer, it does not diminish the presence of God in the lives of those unhealed that day. How can we faithfully receive God's "no" when our hearts long for "yes"?

Close in prayer, inviting God's healing touch into our lives.