

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

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?

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