



JESUS' DEITY REVEALED • THE HEALING AT BETHESDA • JOHN 5:1-9 •
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MAIN POINT

Jesus is the Source of life, by whom we are made whole.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Consider the times in your life when you were called to help those in need.
What prompted the call? How did you respond?**

While we all might take advantage of opportunities to help someone in need, the truth of the matter is that, as flawed human beings, we also sometimes ignore, deflect, dismiss, or put off opportunities to serve others. Therefore, it is important to examine the example of serving others that Jesus provided in John 5. Jesus sought out the opportunity to serve a man in need. Jesus not only healed the man of his physical suffering, but also redirected the man's focus on the source of eternal healing and eternal hope—God the Father. As we

study this passage, look for examples that demonstrate how we should serve others around us just as Jesus has served us.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 5:1-4.

The Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem was a common gathering place for individuals with disabilities. Legend said that an angel frequently stirred up the waters of the pool, and whoever entered the water first would be healed. Thus when Jesus went to this place, He knew He would encounter individuals with physical needs there.

Why do you think Jesus went out of His way to visit this particular place?

How was His decision to visit this place a statement to both His critics and His followers? What does this decision indicate to His followers today?

Note that Jesus actively sought out the opportunity to serve someone in need—He didn't wait for the opportunity to present itself to Him. Also, note that Jesus took His ministry not to the high and mighty, but to the low and the weak. So, too, should we seek out ministry opportunities that serve those who live on the margins of our society.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 5:5-6.

The way in which Jesus approached the man at the Pool of Siloam was threefold: He saw the man in need, He recognized his condition, and He asked the man a question. Though these steps appear simple, they demonstrate Jesus' utmost kindness and gentleness as He pursued a man who needed healing. Note that before Jesus healed the man, He looked at him with compassion and then proceeded to help. In every way, Jesus showed He was intentional about healing and saving this man.

Why do you think the Scripture notes that Jesus “saw him”? In what ways do you think Jesus “saw” this man?

In what ways can we “see” someone beyond just merely locating them with our eyes?

What often prevents us from acting to help those with physical needs?

How do Jesus’ actions in this verse provide a model for the way that we should act when we encounter someone with a physical (or emotional or psychological) need?

Just before healing him, Jesus asked the man a question: “Do you want to get well?” (v. 6, CSB). Why do you think Jesus asked the man this particular question?

The answer to Jesus’ question at first appears to be obvious. Yet, Jesus asked the question because He was seeking a faithful response from the man, a reply that indicated the man sought Jesus not only for his physical needs, but also for his spiritual needs.

Why does God require our faithful response before, during, and after He acts on our behalf?

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 5:7-9A.

What reasons does the man provide in response to Jesus’ question? Why do you think he said what he did?

The man does not respond directly to Jesus’ question. We can infer from the man’s response that he very much wanted to be healed, but was overcome by hopelessness because of the many barriers that seemed to lie in his way. The desperate man provides three reasons for why he cannot get well: 1) he has no one to help him; 2) when he is able to make his way to the pool, someone gets in ahead of him; and 3) most significantly, he believes the water in the pool will be the source of his healing. Such a response is one of hopelessness. Yet consider Jesus’ response to the man’s list of reasons: “Get up ... pick up your mat and walk” (v. 8, CSB). Jesus did not offer the man a sermon about his unbelief or

his sin; He did not address the man's lack of hope with words but with actions. In response to the man's hopelessness, Jesus gave three direct commands, which the man immediately followed.

Which of the man's three reasons (listed above) did Jesus' method of healing most immediately address?

Jesus addressed the real issue, the man's misplaced faith in the water, and thus provided the true source of the man's healing. Jesus' response focused the man's faith on God as the source of all healing.

In what areas of life do we often misplace our faith or focus on solutions that do not address our real problem?

What are some tactics you use to refocus your attention on Jesus?

Note the way this passage presents the progression of change in our lives. First, Jesus challenges us to do the very thing we think we cannot do—often, the problem is our lack of focus on Him. Second, Jesus challenges our tendency to be complacent in our hopelessness—often, our reasons for not seeking change stem from a lack of faith. And finally, Jesus expects us to continue to move forward, utilizing the change He has brought forth into our lives to propel us into service for Him.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Consider those in your community who have unmet physical, emotional, or psychological needs. In what ways does your church seek to meet the needs of one or more of these groups of people? What are some ways for you or your group to be involved in one of these ministries.

Consider this week some of the barriers that prevent or distract you from participating in ministry opportunities for those in need. Take those barriers to God in prayer this week, asking Him to show you how to overcome the challenges that might keep you from serving His people in need.

PRAY

Close in prayer, asking God to help group members truly “see” those in need this week with Christ’s compassion and grace. Ask God to enable your group to serve one or more groups on the margins of society by meeting their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

COMMENTARY

JOHN 5:1-17

5:1–3. As chapter 5 opens, John made a geographical switch from Galilee to Jerusalem and specifically the Pool of Bethesda, a gathering place for invalids. Apparently the pool was located in the northeast corner of the old city. It functioned under considerable local superstition as a place with miraculous healing powers.

John also dropped a vague chronological note when he observed it was feast time. Many interpreters argue this was a second Passover, but Tasker warns, “If we adopt the better-attested reading a feast in v. 1, which now has the additional support of the Bodmer Papyrus, the reference could be to any feast, and there is no need to assume, as many commentators do, that the chapters have been dislocated, and to attempt to restore the ‘original’ order by placing chapter 4 before chapter 5.

Many suggestions have been offered as a substitute for the Passover—Pentecost, Purim, Dedication, Trumpets. But two arguments persist: a recognition of this feast as the

Passover would stretch the record of John through three and one-half years, a figure commonly preferred by most evangelical Bible scholars for the earthly ministry of Jesus.

Also, it was an important enough feast to draw Jesus back to Jerusalem and we must consider that impact. Borchert indicates that the strong emphasis on Sabbath in this chapter may be the key to recognizing a Passover feast here. He says, “The problem with searching for a name for the unnamed feast is that it involves filling in what is perceived to be a chronological gap in John, failing to realize the theological nature of these festival statements and the cyclical pattern that focuses these chapters on Passover.”

5:4. The fourth verse has no significant textual support and is therefore omitted by the NIV, although some will be familiar with wording from the KJV describing the angel who would stir up the waters and the hope that the first person in the pool after such a swirling would be healed.

5:5–7. As in Sychar and Cana, Jesus focused on a single individual, this time a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years. He asked the crucial question, Do you want to get well? The man responded by raising the obvious problem. He could not get well because he could not get down to the healing pool fast enough. The man had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. Why did Jesus choose him now, and why him from among all the other disabled people gathered around the pool? The only possible answer is God’s sovereign grace. In the Father’s timing, this was the time, the place, and the way he would heal this man. The length and extent of the man’s illness presented no problem for Jesus.

We tend to think that time produces hopelessness. Surely the longer a person is sick, the less likely that he or she will get well. The longer a person has lived in sin, the less likely that person will come to Christ. We have all the statistics to show that we must win people to Christ when they are young or the chances diminish. The argument is sound on the basis of what we know, bolstered by human experience. But God is the master of difficult situations just like this one. What is humanly impossible, God loves to do. Perhaps Jesus intentionally chose the veteran Bethesda-pool invalid to prove his divine grace. Even today God may choose difficult people through whom he will prove his grace.

5:8–9a. These verses describe the miraculous cure. The original question in verse 6 focused on the man’s infatuation with magical powers and traditional superstition. If the pool had really been God’s healing agent, Jesus could have just helped the man in the water first after the angelic stirring. But the words Get up! Pick up your mat and walk

emphasize that Jesus was the source of divine healing, not some kind of wave pool. When you are really sick, miracle is preferable to magic.

We dare not miss the absence of faith here. The man did not ask for help; he showed no faith that John reports; and he did not even know who Jesus was. Contrast this miracle with the royal official's son in John 4. Let us notice too that the Lord's ministry was not primarily social, just as ours is not. He had the power to clean out the entire pool area. Not a single invalid could have survived the power of God. But he healed only one man, and that seems to have been done to form a basis for the message to follow. Throughout this book I will refer to this process as the miracle-message method in which a "selective" miracle lays the groundwork for a sermon. We see it here regarding authority over the Sabbath, in chapter 6 where the feeding of the five thousand forms the basis for the sermon on the bread of life. We also see it in chapter 9 where the healing of the blind man leads to a sermon on spiritual blindness followed by the sermon on the good shepherd in chapter 10, and finally in chapter 11 where the healing of Lazarus leads to a sermon on life.

Hot Springs National Park has warm and relaxing facilities—but no ultimate cure. Yet it has drawn millions to that site. But God does not need "stirring pools" to work in our lives. We do not need crosses around our necks, a saintly figurine on the car dashboard, or even oil on the head for healing. Sometimes God wants us to ask as the royal official did. And sometimes he asks for faith before he acts. But God does not need our help, our permission, or even our faith when he chooses to work in our lives or in the lives of our loved ones.

5:9b–10. Jesus performed this miracle on the Sabbath and that became the point of argument in the next four chapters. Why the fuss over a day? Because people want rules, not grace. They want to boast about what they did to earn merit from God. This attitude opposes the gospel. Luke mentioned the Sabbath only nine times in Acts, and not once in connection with Christian worship. But the Pharisees could not get over this hurdle which troubled them during the entire time of Jesus' life on earth.

This dramatic healing attracted the typical reaction from the Jews—a phrase uncommon to the Synoptics but used seventy times in John, usually to describe religious leaders opposing Christ. The New Testament is not anti-Semitic. Jesus wept over Jerusalem and constantly proclaimed the Gospel to any Jews who would listen. Paul went from synagogue to synagogue offering salvation to his own people first.

The Sabbath, of course, was always the seventh day (and is so today) never the first, though we sometimes incorrectly refer to Sunday in this way. This issue dominates the next four chapters of John as the hypocrisy and formalism of religious observance link the first century with our modern time.

This was no accident—Jesus did not just forget it was Saturday. He was not ignorant of the provision that the rabbis had added to God’s Sabbath law: “Whoever on the Sabbath brings anything in or takes anything out from a public place to a private one, if he has done this inadvertently, he shall sacrifice for his sins; but if willingly, he shall be cut off and shall be stoned.” The scribes had come up with thirty-nine tasks prohibited on the Sabbath. Certainly Jesus knew that healing on the Sabbath would upset the religious leaders. He knew that by commanding the man to carry his mat out of a public place he would anger them even more. So why did he do it? The dialogue rages over the next several chapters, but the central idea has to do with the authority of Jesus as the Son of God.

5:11–13. In these three verses we see how little the man actually knew. This startling stranger had walked into his life, given him back normality in his legs, and then disappeared. The man’s reply to the Jews (doubtless the leaders of the Sanhedrin) reflected his willing obedience, reminiscent of the royal official in chapter 4. The exchange betrayed the Jewish leaders’ shallow understanding of theology; they focused on the carried mat, not the new legs.

5:14–17. The innocent response is followed by the final warning—a brief section of a verse which fits significantly into the miracle-message method John records so carefully. Indeed, John 5:14 must be compared theologically with John 9:3. In the first case, one must conclude that the lameness was caused by sin; and in the second, clearly the blindness was not. The Greek text might better be translated, “Give up sinning.” The something worse could refer to a physical illness more burdensome than the one the man had carried for so many years, or it might suggest spiritual disaster, even eternal condemnation.

READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

John 6:1-15

