

Miracle 9: Jesus Heals an Invalid at Bethesda John 5:1-15

The Context of the Miracle (5:1-5): Eight contextual observations:

1. Jesus returns to Jerusalem after ministry in the regions of Galilee. His reason for return is “a feast of the Jews” (v. 1). This is likely the Feast of the Passover; though some commentators suggest the Feast of Pentecost. The Scriptures don’t say; and which feast is being referenced is not essential to the context.
2. Regardless, now in Jerusalem, Jesus approaches a pool of water called Bethesda (meaning “house of mercy”). It is near a sheep gate (the place where they brought in sheep for sacrifice) and surrounded by five porches (covered colonnades; shelters for the sick).
3. In these five porches lay a multitude (great number) of impotent (feeble), blind, lame, and withered people (v. 3a).
4. Verses 3b-4 are about an angel healing at the pool of Bethesda. Difficulties with these verses and not wanting to take the focus away from Jesus’ miraculous healing, we will not look at these verses at this time.
5. A man having an infirmity (weakness, frailty) for 38 years was laying there (v. 5).
6. No exact description of the disease is mentioned at this time; but it is likely a paralytic disorder (thus he is called an invalid).
7. This poor man was sitting by the pool, waiting with all the others for the slightest movement in the water. Whatever his illness was, it didn't permit him to go into the water - even if he saw it stir. His only hope was for someone to have mercy upon him and put him into the water before anyone else could get in. But while he made whatever motion he could to the water, someone else inevitably got in before him - spoiling his chance (so he thought) of being healed. And so, there he lay by the pool of Bethesda, waiting and watching for his chance, struggling and failing each time, for a total of thirty-eight years!
8. Do you realize that this means he had been doing this since several years before Jesus Himself had been born into the world?

The Cause of the Miracle (5:6-7): Eight causal observations:

- 1) Jesus, seeing this man lying there and knowing he had been there a long time, asks him this question, “Do you wish to become whole?” (v. 6).
- 2) There is a lot in this verse. First, Jesus “saw” the man and “knew” he had been there “much time.” How did He know? There is no record that the man or anyone else told him. This is obviously supernatural knowledge (omniscience); another miracle itself in demonstrating His deity (Psalm 139:1-3).
- 3) Jesus sees and knows all about the hopeless, hurting people including everything you might be going through right now. As the Bible tells us, we don't have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses; but rather, we have One who was "in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). You can never, ever go through anything that He doesn't know about perfectly, doesn't understand the pain of completely, or doesn't care about infinitely. You can confidently, as Peter says, cast all your care upon Him, "for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).
- 4) Why did Jesus ask this question, “Do you wish (desire) to become whole?” The fact that the man had been there 38 years wanting to be first in the water to be healed should make this question the most ridiculous question anyone could have asked. But it’s not.

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- 5) Jesus had a reason for asking the question. Some of the potential reasons might be: 1) that the man might have an opportunity of declaring his case in the hearing of the multitude; 2) to rouse the man out of his lethargy and despondency to an expectation of being cured; or 3) to raise him to faith and hope. Regardless of the reason, the man had not asked for healing, but Jesus asked him.
- 6) Why didn't the man simply say, 'Yes'? He didn't say anything even close to "Yes"! Instead, he said, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but, while I am coming, another (person) steps down before me" (v. 7). This man expressed a complaint over the injustice of his circumstances; with perhaps even the expectation of the sympathy it would evoke from others.
- 7) All he had experienced was selfish people rushing down into the pool, easily crowding out one who was friendless and more helpless than most. Perhaps, he thought this stranger, whom he had never seen before, would do for him what none of those who often saw him had ever done.
- 8) The question that He asked that man is one that He also asks us: "Do you want to be made well?"

The Commands (and Response) of the Miracle (5:8-9a): Jesus declares three commands (imperatives):

- 1) First, He said, "Rise"; which was as if to say, "Don't lay down on the ground like an invalid any longer."
- 2) Second, He said, "Take up your bed (mattress)" - that 'token' that he always had with him of his misery.
- 3) And, third, He said, "Walk"; which was as if to say, "I have healed you. Don't expect to be carried anymore."
- 4) And then, the Bible says, "And immediately the man was made whole (well), took his mattress, and walked." When Jesus speaks, diseased muscles and limbs immediately obey. Complete obedience to all three commands.

The Consequences (results) of the Miracle (5:9b-15): Eleven consequential observations:

- 1) Jesus had knowingly healed on the Sabbath (v. 9b). He also clearly knew that carrying burdens on the Sabbath was forbidden in the Old Testament (Jer. 17:21-22; Neh. 13:15, 19). Stoning was the rabbinical punishment.
- 2) Why did He do it? The Scriptures do not say; but perhaps to call attention to his authority and power; and/or for the purpose of exposing the ridiculous extensions and additions to God's sabbath regulations which had been so mercilessly bound upon the people by the Scribes and Pharisees.
- 3) Right away the Jews confront the man about carrying his bed (mattress) on the Sabbath (v. 10). For these Jewish religious authorities, the healing of the man was a minor detail. This event violated their hair-splitting interpretations of Sabbath laws. They ignored the healing and inquired only of him who had commanded to take up and walk (v. 12).
- 4) Now after healing the man, Jesus withdrew into the crowd and disappeared from the man's sight (v. 13). Apparently, all of this happened rather quickly. The man didn't even know who healed him (v. 13). Does this mean Jesus had no intention of dealing with this man's soul? Was Jesus content just to do a random miracle and leave the man in ignorance as to where it came from? No.
- 5) Later on, Jesus sought the man out (v. 14) - which, again, is a great act of kindness and love on the part of Jesus. And where do we read that Jesus found the man? In the temple (v. 14). After his healing, the man demonstrated the transformation that had been brought

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about in his life by the fact that he went to the temple (perhaps for the first time in 38 years to worship and offer his thanks to the God who so graciously healed him). This man went from being a nearly life-long, hopelessly miserable invalid to being a bed-carrying, temple-worshipping witness for Jesus. What a transformation!

- 6) What is the real issue of this miracle? Jesus reveals it in verse 15. Jesus says, “Behold” (Greek ide #2396 meaning Behold, Look, Don’t miss this, Be sure to see). Behold what? “Thou hast become whole” (physical healing has miraculously occurred). Yes, but what He says next is Jesus’ real focus— “no longer sin.” Literally, “Stop sinning.” This was not so much about health or healing; it’s about **holiness**. In other words: “I have healed you that you may be holy, that you may stop doing evil, and that you may not rise to the resurrection of judgment, but to the resurrection of life. I have pointed you to myself as a life-giver. I heal in more ways than one. Don’t turn from me to a life of sin.”
- 7) Why again? “Lest something worse comes to thee” (v. 14). Resurrection to judgment rather than resurrection to life. Jesus left hundreds unhealed at the pool of Bethesda. And he told the one man he did heal, who had not even believed on him, that He was pursuing his holiness. In this calling to faith and holiness, Jesus dealt with both the physical and spiritual needs of this man.
- 8) Further, in saying “sin no longer,” Jesus was not speaking of sinless perfection. He was warning against living a sinful lifestyle vs. holiness. It should be the goal of every Christian to “sin no more,” although we recognize that, while we are in the flesh, we will still stumble (I John 1:8). God’s desire for each of us is to be holy as He is holy (I Pet. 1:16). We still sin, but sin is no longer a lifestyle choice (I John 3:9-10). When we fail, we can come to God and ask forgiveness (I John 1:9). And if we are truly God’s children, He will correct us, disciplining us when we need it (Heb. 12:6). His work is to conform us to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29).
- 9) “The man departed and told the Jews” (v. 15). Why? The answer is found in what he told the Jews “Jesus made me whole.” He wanted Jesus to get the credit (glory) for the miraculous healing, but was willing to take responsibility for the carrying of the mattress (breaking the Sabbath- their focus). The man was neither ungrateful nor did he willingly betray Jesus by telling the Jews.
- 10) Initially, this man had no faith. He didn’t even know who Jesus was. This account destroys the idea that all of Jesus’ miracles are consequences of faith. When did this man believe? It was either at or before Jesus saying “sin no longer.” Unbelievers don’t have the capacity to stop sinning; so, the command indicates that he now believes.
- 11) One’s eternal destiny is much more important than one’s temporal disability.