



Sunday, January 11, 2026

John 5:1-15

As we step into John 5 this morning, although this is a brand new chapter, we have to understand that the story that we are about to read is a continuation of the theme that John is drawing out in the first portion of his book. We've walked through a number of different stories already, and although they may not be in chronological order, what's most important for John is choosing the stories that clearly emphasize the sovereignty of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, Messiah of the world. This has been a running theme throughout every single story and it's no different with the story we are about to read today.

So with that in mind, if you have your Bibles with you this morning, I'd like to invite you to turn with me to John 5:1-15. If you are able to, please stand for the reading of the Word of the Lord:

John 5:1-15

'After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. 3 In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. 4 For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. 5 Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"

7 The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me."

8 Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." 9 And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.

And that day was the Sabbath. 10 The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed."

11 He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'"

12 Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" 13 But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. 14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."

15 The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

There's a lot to unpack here in order to see the significance of what Jesus is doing, so what I'd like to do today is start right back at the beginning where Jesus' location is emphasized.

We read that Jesus is now back in Jerusalem and finds Himself at a pool specifically by the Sheep Gate. Now, before we go any further, we need to understand the layout of the city of Jerusalem, as it is very different from the layout of cities in our modern-day context. Jerusalem was a walled city. Surrounding it was a massive stone wall designed for protection. Movement in and out of the city was through specific gates that were built into the wall. These gates weren't just openings though - they were controlled access points that shaped how life flowed in and out of the city.

We've already mentioned the Sheep Gate, but there were several others as well - for example, the Fish Gate, the Dung Gate, and even the Water Gate were some of the main access points into Jerusalem. And over time, these gates would have taken on particular identities based on what usually passed through them.

For example, if you were bringing animals in to be sacrificed at the Temple, you would come through the Sheep Gate. If you were buying or selling fish or market goods, the Fish Gate was your access point. The Dung Gate was primarily for waste removal...obviously...lol. And naturally the Water Gate provided access to Jerusalem's water systems.

So when John tells us that Jesus is located by the Sheep Gate, that detail matters because even though He is standing at the gate of sacrifice, He is there without a sacrifice in hand. Why? Because ultimately, He Himself would be that sacrifice - the final sacrifice - pointing to the day when He would accomplish what the entire sacrificial system never could.

This is exactly what the Apostle Paul would later articulate to the church in Rome:

Romans 8:3a

‘For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son...’

John will also reference this later in chapter 10 by saying:

John 10:7 when Jesus says, ‘I am the gate for the sheep.’

Meaning that access to God would no longer come through a system built on animal sacrifices or even a physical gate - but through Him, the final sacrifice.

So - clearly, even in the opening verses, even Jesus’ basic posture and location is clearly showing His authority as the King of kings, Lord of lords, Messiah of all.

And so, from that gate, Jesus now moves to a pool with five porches, known in Hebrew as Bethesda - which means House of Mercy. Again, John gives us details here because he wants us to see something.

The five porches represent the Torah - the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Jewish leaders and the Pharisees held tightly to these books because they defined the full parameters of the Law. They lived under them. They taught from them. And they believed obedience to the Law was the pathway to life and blessing.

And yet here, in this pool known as the House of Mercy, surrounded by these five porches, this House of Mercy is filled not with healed people, but with the sick, the broken, and the dying. The point being that the Law could surround them, but it could not restore them. It could name what was wrong, but it could not make them whole.

And so frustration and hopelessness lead to superstition.

A superstition that was rooted in the idea that an angel might stir the waters, and whoever entered first would be healed.

You may notice that this explanation appears as verse 4 in some Bible translations, but not in others.

Most scholars agree that verse 4 was likely a later addition, included by early scribes as a way of explaining the belief referenced in verse 7. In other words, the verse doesn't introduce a new idea - it simply explains what people at the pool already believed to be true.

And so, historically, scholars suggest the 'stirring' was likely caused by fresh water flowing into the pool, creating a visible disturbance. Whatever the case, the pool was a place of hope mixed with disappointment, where healing was promised but rarely - if ever - realized.

And it's into that context that Jesus now engages conversation with a man who had been lame for 38 years. Jesus asks him if he wants to be well and he affirms, but then expresses his challenges of getting into the pool first as a lame man with no one to help carry him. So he is hopeless. We don't know how long he has been by this pool, but one can imagine that it has been quite some time and every day that goes by is yet another reminder that he is stuck in his position.

Jesus looks at him and speaks very clearly: rise, take up your bed and walk. And miraculously, this lame man does exactly as Jesus says. He stands up, takes his bed and walks. The Pharisees see him and ask him how this happened and he says that a man did it, but did not recognize Jesus as anything more than that. The Pharisees were upset because this was the Sabbath and would have been considered in their viewpoint as work. The next thing we see is that this man is now in the temple and comes across Jesus again, who now affirms that he has been made well and encourages him to be on his way, but to sin no more unless something worse comes upon him. This man then goes back to the Pharisees and tells them that it was Jesus, and this is the end of the story - at least until the next section.

It's hard to read the story without going into the next part of the text which we will next time, but in that section, we learn that the Pharisees and Jewish leaders were so infuriated by this that they sought to kill Jesus, and this is the point where we see their hardened hearts really start to take shape.

That is next time, but for the sake of today, there are a number of things that I think we can glean from in this story of Jesus healing the lame man.

First.

Notice that the very first interaction with Jesus and the lame man begins with a question by Jesus. Do you want to be made well? It's a question of intent. It's also a question of desire.

And at first, it feels almost misplaced, doesn't it? Of course the man wants to be healed. He's been lying by this pool for decades with that very hope. So why would Jesus even ask?

Well, perhaps Jesus is not asking the same question the man is answering.

Think about it. We've seen something similar before haven't we? In the story of the woman at the well. When Jesus speaks to her about thirst, she assumes He's talking about physical water. But Jesus is actually identifying a deeper, spiritual thirst - one that goes far beyond the immediate physical need.

And it seems that Jesus is doing the same thing here. This man's physical condition has consumed his entire world. His pain, every day waiting by the pool, his limitations have taken up all of his energy - physical, emotional, and mental. And in the process, his spiritual condition has likely gone unexamined.

So when Jesus asks, 'Do you want to be made well?' He uses the Greek word 'hygiēs' which is where we get the root word for hygiene from, but when Jesus is using it here, He has the whole mind, body and spirit in view. He's subtly revealing that there may be more layers of brokenness to this man than what seems to be most obvious.

We see evidence of this later in the passage, when the man encounters Jesus again - this time in the Temple. Jesus now says to him, 'See, you have been made well.' That much is obvious to everyone. But Jesus doesn't stop there. He goes on to say, 'Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.'

And I'll be honest, at first, that can sound confusing - even troubling - almost as though Jesus is suggesting that the healing he just experienced is conditional upon his future behaviour. But that's not what Jesus is saying. He is not linking the man's physical condition to a specific sin, nor is He threatening to take that healing away.

What Jesus is doing is shifting the man's attention from this life to the next. In other words, whether he can walk or not in this life is not the ultimate issue.

Healing matters - but sin matters more, because sin has eternal consequences.

That's why Jesus addresses this man's sin. Not to threaten the man, and not to diminish the miracle - but to remind him that his wholeness is as much spiritual as it is physical.

I like what John Piper has to say here. He interprets Jesus words this way:

"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." (John Piper)

This is a running theme for Jesus all throughout the Gospels. He says things like, 'It is better to enter life without an eye or a hand or a foot than to enter hell with both.' Not because the physical body doesn't matter - but because eternity matters more.

He's in essence saying to the man that if you don't take this opportunity to live for Me but choose now to live a life of sin with your new found freedom, then your eternal fate of separation from God will be worse than the paralysis you experienced in your physical body.

Again, we see that Jesus is revealing to this man, His sovereignty as the Lord of lords, King of kings, Saviour of the world. And the second point I want you to see now confirms just that.

Second.

Notice now the timing of this miracle - that Jesus intentionally performed this miraculous act on the Sabbath. This was by no means a mistake or a coincidence. Jesus knew exactly what He was doing because he was trying to send a message to the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders of that day.

Notice the immediate response of the Jewish leaders to the man that they had likely seen lame for years now walking. There is no celebration. No joy. No praising God. Instead, their response is: 'It is the Sabbath, and you are violating it by carrying your bed.'

Think about it - a man who had been lame for 38 years was now carrying his bed and all they could see was the perceived violation.

There's a phrase we use for that - 'missing the forest for the trees.' It's basically walking into a field of trees and asking where the forest is and not realizing you're standing right in the middle of it.

Think about what this miracle would have entailed. 38 years of seized bones and joints and atrophied

muscles all coming together in perfect regeneration and in an instant they had full strength.

And the Pharisees couldn't see that!!

They couldn't see what God was doing because they were too focused on what they thought went wrong instead of what God made right.

In Mark's gospel, he shares a similar story where Jesus and His disciples are walking through a wheat-field and picking the grain and eating it. The Pharisees confront them on their supposed violation of the Sabbath.

Jesus' response was beautiful:

Mark 2:27-28

'27 And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. 28 Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

To understand what Jesus means, we have to go all the way back to the beginning of creation. In Genesis, God worked for six days and rested on the seventh - not because He was tired, but because He wanted to create a model where His people would realize the value of rest and renewal. That it is a gift. A reward. A rhythm built into creation because God knows that His people need rest and renewal.

So when the fourth commandment was given - to honour the Sabbath and keep it holy - this was the heart behind it.

But over time, in an effort to protect the commandment, religious leaders began to define it with increasing detail - lists of what could and couldn't be done. And slowly, something that was meant to be a posture of trust and freedom became a burden. What was intended to give life began to produce guilt and shame.

And that's exactly what we see here in John 5.

A man is healed. And all they can see is the perceived violation.

They completely missed the forest for the trees.

And if I'm being completely honest, so can we.

So can I.

Confession time. As ministers there's a lot of pressure that we feel in leading the church - God's church. And often that pressure can be felt with church metrics. How many people are showing up, how well people are giving, how many services we're running...etc.

And sometimes - even I - especially I - can miss the forest for the trees. I can become so focused on the numbers and the metrics that I actually miss the depth of discipleship that God is actually forming within His people - quietly, faithfully and sometimes even invisibly.

It's not that metrics aren't important - they are. They help us pay attention and steward well. But they were never meant to define success or replace discernment. Numbers can tell us what is happening, but they can't always tell us what God is doing.

And that's the tension in John 5. A miracle has taken place, but it goes unnoticed because the focus is elsewhere. Life has broken in, and yet all anyone can see is what doesn't fit their expectations.

And so, if we're not careful, we too can find ourselves standing in the presence of what God is doing - and still miss the forest for the trees.

2 Points to consider:

Jesus intentionally asked the lame man the question: 'Do you want to be made well?' For the lame man, it was a question with multiple layers, and a reminder that Jesus cares for all of us - not just our spiritual side but also our physical side. So what if we were to make this question personal? What if Jesus was sitting beside you right now and asked you the same question. Do you want to be made well? How would you respond? What does being made whole look like for you?

Sometimes - like the pharisees, and even like me - we too can often miss the forest for the trees. Meaning that we can easily miss what God is doing because our focus lies elsewhere. Maybe our prayer needs to be that God would give us eyes to see what He is doing. That He would give us eyes to see. Maybe this is why the New Testament is filled with this prayer. Oh Lord, give us eyes to see. Oh that we would be a generation that 'sees' with the eyes and heart of the Lord.

Blessing

May the Lord Bless you and Keep you

May He cause His face to Shine upon you

May He be gracious towards you

Lift up His countenance upon you

And may He give you peace

In Jesus name, Amen.

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