

# The Seven Signs of Jesus

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[ 0 : 00 ] We'll be in John chapter 5. You'll also see the words on the screen. We've been thinking about seven signs that John records in his gospel that point to who Jesus is and why he came.

So we come now to his fourth sign that he records. So John chapter 5. Let's hear God's word together. Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals.

Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda, and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie, the blind, the lame, the paralysed.

One who was there had been an invalid for 38 years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, Do you want to get well?

Sir, the invalid replied, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me. Then Jesus said to him, Get up, pick up your mat and walk.

[ 1 : 13 ] At once the man was cured. He picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath. And so the Jewish leader said to the man who had been healed, It is the Sabbath.

The law forbids you to carry your mat. But he replied, The man who made me well said to me, Pick up your mat and walk. So they asked him, Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?

The man who was healed had no idea who it was. For Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. Later, Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, See, you are well again.

Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defence, Jesus said to them, My father is always at work to this very day and I too am working.

[ 2 : 16 ] For this reason, they tried all the more to kill him. Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God.

So our fourth sign, a healing at the pool of Bethesda. Whether you're listening today and you've been a Christian for a number of years, maybe even for decades, or if this is your first time visiting an online church, when we spend any time at all with Jesus in the Gospels, it is almost certain that he will take us by surprise, that sometimes he will perhaps even shock us.

When we read his teaching, we discover here is someone with a great love for God and for people, somebody who taught about love and demonstrated love, but also someone who could talk equally clearly about the judgment of God.

So nobody spoke about hell more than Jesus and we think, how do love and justice come together? And that surprises us. Maybe our surprise comes when we think about how he relates to other people.

We see his patience, his kindness towards his disciples, even towards Judas who would betray him. Think about the way he welcomed the outsiders when everyone else would have been scandalised by spending time with some of the notorious people in Jesus' day.

[ 4 : 03 ] Jesus welcomed them and shared the good news with them. Perhaps our surprise and our shock comes when we think about the miracles of Jesus and we see him working in his world.

Well, today in our story, Jesus says four things, four sentences, each of which I suspect when we stop and reflect, we might find it surprising and perhaps even shocking.

That was certainly true for the first people that heard Jesus speak. So this is the fourth of seven signs and it takes us again to the heart of the signs and John's purpose for them.

This sign will speak to the mission of Jesus. Again, we will see him on a mission of mercy, bringing good news of salvation. But it will also clearly point to his identity.

Here is Jesus, the son of God, who is God's chosen and sent saviour for the world. And as we think about these surprising words of Jesus, let's be careful not to make the mistake of the man in the story.

[ 5 : 17 ] Thinking about how he relates to Jesus, in a sense he might remind us of a child on their birthday, grabbing for the gifts, with no attention given to the giver at all, just want the stuff.

And I hope we'll all realise that we need more than simply a sign. We need more than Jesus giving us temporary help for our trouble.

You and I need Jesus as our Lord and saviour, whoever we are today. So let's begin with the probing question that Jesus asks.

The first six verses give us the setting and then we get Jesus' first word. So the setting is this pool, this pool of Bethesda. And perhaps you know of hospices or hospitals that go by the name of Bethesda, named after our story.

Bethesda was a gathering place for sufferers. Many sufferers were there. It was a place that was sheltered from the hot sun. And there was also a belief that the pool had healing properties.

[ 6 : 33 ] And so people would gather waiting for it to bubble up. You might think of a leisure pool and that sense of anticipation, waiting for the wave machine to come on and the excitement.

Well, imagine waiting for those bubbles in the hope that you're suffering. It might be over. So we're told in our story, there's this whole poolside of sufferers and Jesus takes the initiative to find out about one.

One man who has been an invalid for 38 years. Now, if you know anything of Jesus, if you've heard any of his stories, you will expect to find in Jesus mercy and compassion for suffering people.

And of course, it is true for us to remember that the heart of Jesus doesn't change. He still has mercy and compassion for suffering people today. But we come to his first words in verse six and maybe we ask ourselves, what kind of question is Jesus asking?

He goes to speak to this man who's been an invalid for 38 years and he asked him, do you want to get well? That seems blindingly obvious that the man would want to get well.

[ 7 : 59 ] So why does Jesus ask the question? Well, when you read John's gospel, we recognise that Jesus often speaks on a higher, on a hidden level.

So in chapter three, he speaks to a religious leader called Nicodemus and he says to him, you must be born again, by which he means you need a work of God. You need the spirit to come and change you from the inside out.

But Nicodemus is thinking, hold on a minute, how can I go back into my mother's womb? That just doesn't make any sense. Or then in chapter four of John's gospel, he's speaking to a woman by the well and Jesus says that he can give living water and the woman looks around and says, hang on a minute, you don't even have a bucket.

How can you possibly give me water? Jesus speaks at a higher and a hidden level. Well, here's this probing question, not a surface question, but a probing question to ask the man, and as we reflect, to ask ourselves to, what is it that you really want?

Jesus is saying to the man, is it just healing you want? Or are you looking for something more? Can you see that your need runs deeper than simply the physical?

[ 9 : 16 ] Because bear in mind who is speaking. Bear in mind that it's Jesus who's asking the question. There's this growing tension in John's gospel. We've begun to see it with the signs. There are some people who are following Jesus only for the signs.

They're here for the show or they're here because they're suffering and they want to get better or they want someone else to get better. So you've got people coming just for the signs while at the same time, they're opposing and rejecting Jesus and his word.

Jesus wants the man and he wants each one of us to recognise Jesus is the son of God and what matters is believing in him and believing in his words and ultimately believing in the work that he came to do, that his death on the cross was a death for my sin, to save me and to give me eternal life.

To recognise that Jesus can do far more for us than we ever realise. This physical healing that Jesus is about to do stands for us as a signpost for the still greater spiritual and eternal healing that Jesus can do in our hearts.

And so that probing question is designed to get the man to that point. And what comes next? The next words of Jesus is a simple command. But first we see how the invalid replies to his question and he's thinking on the lower level as many people do when they talk to Jesus.

[10:49] I have no one to help me into the pool while I'm trying to get in. Someone else goes down ahead of me. Jesus, have you come to help me into the pool? Have you come to lift me and help me to beat the rush so I can be front of the queue?

And what we discovered is Jesus come to do something far more remarkable than that. Here's the next words of Jesus. Get up, pick up your mat and walk.

Now these are bold words. This is Jesus either incredibly heartless asking a paralysed man to do something he would love to do but can't by himself or powerful words of healing and transformation. And of course we discover in verse 9 that it's that second that is true. at once the man was cured. He picked up his mat and walked.

Instant healing. A 38 year disability gone. No need for the water. Here's a clear signpost that Jesus and Jesus alone is the source of help and hope.

[11:58] There are no secret words uttered over him. Nothing is magical about it. Jesus speaks a simple command and he's able to get up and walk.

No doubt this man had dreamed of recovering his mobility and had probably after 38 years given up but Jesus has enabled him. Jesus has provided the strength for him to obey.

Gives us an insight into the way faith works. The Bible is really honest. It says that by ourselves left to ourselves unless God intervenes we remain opposed to God.

We turn our back on God. We are enemies of God spiritually dead and incapable of finding eternal life. So we need God to work and God by his grace enables us gives us the gift of faith so that we are able to believe.

And we see a glimpse of that in this story. But here Jesus issues a simple command and the man is called to obey and when he obeys there's healing. There's a story in the Old Testament connecting water and healing.

[13:15] The story of a man called Naaman a powerful army commander from Syria who had it all but who also had leprosy.

And his king sent him to Israel and eventually to the prophet Elisha for healing and Elisha's servant comes to Naaman and gives him a very simple command wash seven times in the Jordan and you will be healed.

He can have the thing that he's looking for but Naaman rather than being delighted he's outraged. He's outraged because he's being asked to do something that's far too easy. His servants say to him look if you'd been told to climb a great mountain fight a great battle you would have done it. So why not do the simple thing believe and when he does he's healed. God's power changes him. When we read our Bibles now the Bible is a big book and it's a book about the eternal infinite God. So there are some big ideas that stretch our mind and in some ways are beyond us but Christianity at heart is a simple message calling for a response.

[14:33] We're told that Jesus' message was repent and believe the good news. Jesus is God's King who's come to bring in God's Kingdom there needs to be a change of heart and mind from us we need to put our trust in Jesus and what he came to do on our behalf.

Later on in the New Testament a question is asked what must I do to be saved and the answer believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. That's not complicated to understand.

That the good news of God's love and God's grace and God's forgiveness that comes to us through faith in Jesus trusting in him it's not hard to understand.

As John Newton the hymn writer and preacher from a previous generation summarised it I am a great sinner and Jesus is a great saviour and given those important truths we are then called to obey to receive the good news to receive Jesus as our saviour.

Now moving from that simple command Jesus next words stand as a loving warning. So from verse 9 onwards we begin to see a controversy opposition because of understandings of the Sabbath and we'll get there in a few minutes but important for us to notice that the picture that's being built up of our invalid here is not very flattering.

[16:18] You look at verse 7 he misses Jesus' higher meaning about the healing that he offers which is spiritual not just physical. In verse 11 to his escape the criticism of the religious leaders he points the finger of blame at Jesus it was Jesus that's making him pick up his mat and walk in verse

13 we discover that he didn't even ask Jesus' name.

He had no idea who Jesus was again to think about our child with no manners. Who's that present from? I don't know. I'm just tearing open the wrapping. And then in verse 15 when he does discover that it was Jesus who healed him what does he do?

He reports Jesus to the authority. So this is not a very flattering picture of our invalid and there's one last really important piece of information to consider and again it goes to the fact that Jesus' words can surprise and some things shock us.

In verse 14 Jesus found the man at the temple and said to him see you are well again stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.

Now there's two implications one of which is that Jesus in some way is saying that the man's condition for 38 years his suffering was in some way connected to sin in his life.

[ 17 : 43 ] Now we're not told what that sin was and why there was the consequence but we do know this is not normal. The Bible is not saying if you suffer it's because of sin.

The religious leaders in Jesus' day they actually believed that. There was a man who was blind from birth and they asked the question well they presumed that either the man had sinned or his parents had sinned and Jesus said no no neither of that is true.

And in the Bible we see that people who are gods who are not guilty have said they suffer we live in a broken and a fallen world and suffering happens.

Someone like Job in the Old Testament described as a righteous man but he suffers. Think about Jesus himself the one sinlessly perfect man who ever lived and he suffered the greatest injustice he suffered he was the suffering servant the son of God rejected abused beaten and nailed to a cross sin.

So we can't and we shouldn't always draw a straight line between suffering and sin but yet Jesus with his knowledge says in some way this man's suffering and sin are connected.

[ 19 : 08 ] But there's another pressing implication for us to consider and we're on much more solid ground with this one. Jesus in effect is saying to the man look I fixed your physical problem.

but you still have a deeper problem. You have a spiritual problem. If a past sin has led to 38 years of disability Jesus issues a loving warning that the sin of rejecting Jesus will lead to something worse will lead to eternal judgment judgment.

Now Jesus is the most loving man who ever lived but here he issues a very obvious warning about judgment. Judgment is a reality and Jesus because of love sounds that warning.

But what we see in the man's life stands in a sense as a warning sign to us. Here is a person who appears content to take the sign where Jesus heals him physically but he leaves, he rejects the saviour that the sign points to.

So long as his body is better that's all he's after. Now let's make this personal. Think about your suffering, your trouble, your trials right now.

[ 20 : 43 ] What dominates your horizon? what is the suffering that you experience? Now perhaps that's loneliness. Loneliness because of lost relationships or relationships you'd love to have but don't have.

Perhaps it's your health. Perhaps it's connected to your career. Things aren't panning out the way that you hope. There is great uncertainty.

You feel unsatisfied. Now here's a question. If you could get relief from that suffering or trial that comes into your mind but you could have it without relationship with Jesus would you take that deal?

If you had the relationship, if you had the health, if you had the job but without Jesus, would you take it? If Jesus could sort out your life but you'd still be left in your sin, would you be okay with that?

Jesus wants us to think deeper and to think more eternally. This man seems to be happy with the surface to take the sign but not the saviour.

[ 22 : 02 ] God is the word of Jesus that we have in our section for today is the striking claim that he makes.

In John chapters 5-7 we see a growing controversy between Jesus and the religious leaders in particular but the Jews in general and one issue that keeps coming up in Jesus ministry is understanding of the Sabbath.

What is work? The Old Testament, the Ten Commandments, one of the commands was to remember the Sabbath day, to have a day that you took off from your normal work, a day set aside for God and to worship him.

But the Jewish leaders had established all kinds of activities that they also classed as work and they said you cannot do these things and one of them was that you couldn't pick up a mat and walk and so they accused the man of Sabbath breaking, they accused Jesus of Sabbath breaking. Now here's where things get really interesting. We're told in verse 16 that because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath he's beginning to be persecuted now. What does he offer as his defence?

[ 23 : 18 ] Not let's sit down and let's look at the Old Testament and let's see how you misunderstand what the Bible teaches about Sabbath. No, he says you misunderstand me.

You have failed to see that I am Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus said to them my father is always at work to this very day and I too am working.

God the father works. He is constantly sustaining the universe and he's not Sabbath breaking when he does that and Jesus says just like my father I too am always working.

I'm doing God's work of restoring and redeeming of bringing mercy and love and life and their response to that. Verse 18 for this reason they tried all the more to kill him because they understand here Jesus is claiming equality with God as his father and they hate him for that.

And Jesus comes and he says you now have to understand what it means that there's only one God in a new way because you need to understand God by reference to Jesus who's come as the full and complete revelation of God in the flesh and they are unwilling to consider that.

[ 24 : 44 ] Now let's put all this together. Here we have Jesus who is equal with God and who is on a mission of mercy and he comes sounding both a promise and a warning that this sign, this healing says I can provide true and lasting healing, I can provide the forgiveness that leads to eternal life but here's the warning, you need to see your deepest need.

Maybe during lockdown, I know this has been lots of people's experience, praying, you've been praying more than you ever have. Maybe for the first time in your life you find yourself praying because you are aware of your need for personal recovery and we're all really aware of the need for national recovery.

But you know this sign says to us go deeper still, don't just settle for a return to normal, Jesus is inviting us to come to him for personal salvation, to pray for national spiritual transformation.

Jesus has come to do his work, to do his father's work which will take him to the cross to die for sinners so that if we put our trust in him, we won't face judgment but we'll have eternal life, that we'll get to know and enjoy Jesus and God the father now with the hope of enjoying him and his presence for all eternity.

That's the true healing we're to pursue and if we want that healing, the healing of a restored relationship of peace with God, of freedom from guilt and fear, we need to get up and we need to go to Jesus.