

John 5:1-18

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Date: 12 October 2025

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[0 : 0 0] Let me pray just while we're standing. Heavenly Father, would you open our hearts to hear your! word this evening in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Folks, yeah, friends, be seated. Be seated. If you don't know me, if you're visiting with us, my name is Aaron. I'm one of the ministers on staff here at St. John's, and I want to add my welcome to the choir. Thank you so much. You guys are unbelievable. We love you and are so grateful that you took time to come.

Visit with us this evening. We are in a sermon series looking at encounters that Jesus had with people. And I remember a few weeks ago, we talked about Nicodemus, who actually I quite like Nicodemus. I think he was curious about Jesus. He came to have a talk to him. And Jesus said, look, you're on the wrong path. And you wonder what happened to this guy, Nicodemus? Well, later on, we remember if you keep reading the Gospels, Nicodemus defends Jesus when Jesus goes trial. And we know that he helped prepare Jesus' body for burial. And the tradition around him is that he became a follower of Christ and that he was martyred for it. Last week, we learned about the woman in the well who had this transformative conversation with Christ. And after meeting Jesus, she went around and started telling people, saying, maybe this is the Messiah.

So we're like this woman. Both of these people, quite likable characters. Their story arc is quite lovely. This week, Jesus' encounter, it's a bit more complicated, isn't it? Because there's no Hollywood ending to this story.

Jesus heals a man who's been an invalid for 38 years. And then the guy throws Jesus under the bus the first chance he gets. So let's look at the story and see what God wants us to know. We're going to talk about three things.

I want to talk about the pool, about the man, and about the Sabbath. The pool, the man, the Sabbath. So let's crack on here, okay? The pool. First of all, it's the least important part, but it's quite interesting, so we're going to get into it.

[2 : 1 4] Okay, so the pool. So there's a pool called Bethesda that was connected to this temple, and it was used for rituals. And the passage says it had five roofed colonnades. And just think gazebo, all right? It's just a gazebo. A colonnade's a gazebo.

So they had these, like, five gazebos on it, which were there for shade. And it became a gathering place for people that were really, really sick or had, you know, physical stuff going on.

And they gathered there for two reasons. One, obviously the shade. It's really hot where it was. Lots of shade. And secondly, there was this superstition around the pool that when you saw sort of bubbles coming up around the pool, that if you got into the water first, you might get blessed or you might get healed or something like that.

Okay. So here is what's interesting about this, is that people for many years said, look, this story in John 5, it can't be true, they would say, Jacob.

They would say it can't be true because there is no such thing as a pool with five gazebos on it, with five colonnades. Archaeologists have never found a pool like this. They always have, like, maybe four or two or one or none.

[3 : 27] So for many years, the presence of this story in the gospel was used as evidence against the historical accuracy of this story.

Well, in the 1900s, late 1880s, they found it. They found the pool in a dig. It was under a church, under an ancient church, and they worked out that there was a pool.

Goodness, it's got five colonnades. And then they found the piece of stone which said the inscription Bethsaida written across it. And they worked out that this pool was destroyed in 70 AD.

So whoever wrote this story, these eyewitnesses were there before 70 AD. So why does this matter? It matters because I just want to remind you, when we hear these stories, stories, we're dealing with history.

Despite what people say. For 2,000 years, it was like, oh, I never found a pool like this. Can't be true. We're dealing with history, friends. This is not a fable. This is not a folk story.

[4 : 33] We're dealing with history. That's all I want to say about the pool. Let's talk about the man. Okay, so the man's complicated. He's had a rough life. But he's also, and I feel terrible saying this, he's not a nice man.

He's not a good man. He doesn't make good decisions here. Now, we don't know what happened to him. We don't know whether he had an accident, and that's why he couldn't move.

We don't know whether there was a sickness or an injury. We don't know. We don't know how old he was. We don't know why Jesus specifically picked him out to heal him. But Jesus did seek him out and healed him out of just grace.

He goes to the pool filled with desperate people, and he singles this man out, and he says, Do you want to be healed? Which is a strange question to ask, I think. But it's a great question because it exposes this guy's heart, which is why I think John included this story in the gospel.

Now, just a reminder, the superstition around this pool was, a bit of bubbles. Get in the pool first. You'll be healed. Okay? Just hold that thought. Okay. So Jesus says, Do you want to be healed?

[5 : 48] How does the man respond? The man just starts talking about how he can't get into the pool quickly enough. He's locked in to one way of thinking about his situation.

And he's doing what many of us do. We limit Jesus to the solution we think we need. He's just like, Jesus, do you want to be healed?

Yeah, just kick me into the pool. Just get me down there. Get me down there. That's what I need. But what Jesus had for him was so much bigger and so much grander and so much better.

And again, it's like us. We want Jesus to give us a push towards the things that we think we need. But Christ has grander plans for us.

Perhaps we want to be married. Perhaps we want to reach some professional milestone in our life. These are understandable things. These are good things. But often we're so focused on just, we just want Jesus to get us those things.

[6 : 54] Just nudge us towards those, Jesus. And can I suggest that Jesus wants more for us. That he wants to do something in us.

And more wonderful than our immediate aspirations. And I think that's what this story is trying to communicate. Okay, so back to the story. So Jesus then ignores the guy's comments and he just says, take up your bed and walk.

Instant miracle. The guy picks up his bed. And he takes off. No expression of gratitude.

He doesn't seem that impressed by Jesus. Or thankful. No acknowledgement at all. And again, like much of the world, I think. You know, we enjoy the great benefits that God has given us.

This whole world is created by, held up by God. And many people just do not acknowledge him. We receive the gift. We ignore the giver. This is what this man did.

[7 : 54] Okay, right then. What happens next? Well, the religious leaders see the man carrying the bed, which is forbidden on the Sabbath. And they're not happy. And he says, I don't know who did this. It's his fault.

Whoever it was, we'll come back to that. Okay, later on, Jesus tracks the man down. This is the second time Jesus has sought this man out.

The man who was ungrateful. But he still seeks him out. The second time he seeks him out. In verse 14, Jesus says, see, you're well. Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.

So what's that about? Well, first, it's not a threat. Jesus acknowledges his life's been tough. But he says, something worse can happen to you.

Now, what's worse? What's worse than what this guy's been through already? Well, what's worse is meeting God unprepared to do so. Which is what Jesus is warning.

[8 : 55] What's worse is receiving the gifts of Christ, receiving the gifts of the creator, and living a life unchanged by it? See, Jesus wants this man to be healed spiritually, inwardly, like all of us.

Like all of us, we need inner restoration. Jesus wants to offer this man much more than just a physical healing. He wants him to be born again into a new life, into a new relationship with his creator, into a new family.

God's great family. The man doesn't respond to Jesus. He just walks away. And he doesn't get spiritually renewed. His legs are strong, but his heart is still corrupted.

But here's what he does get from Jesus in that interaction. He gets Jesus' name. And he goes straight to the religious leaders and says, it was Jesus that did this to me.

And he knows what he's doing. And that's when the religious leaders ramp up their plan to kill Christ.

[10 : 07] As an aside, if you have ever held out forgiveness and healing to someone and you get nothing back, Jesus understands what that's like.

Let's keep moving. We've talked about the pool. We've talked about the man. Now let's talk about Sabbath. Because that seems quite important, doesn't it?

That's like this kind of thing going on here. We need to wrap our heads around. So the really religious types are really, they're up in arms in our story. Verse 9. Now the day was the Sabbath.

So the Jews said to the man who'd been healed, it's the Sabbath. It's not lawful for you to take up your bed. Which is wild. They're not interested in the healing. They're not interested in the miracle. They're only interested in the fact that a Sabbath rule was broken.

And remember, you weren't supposed to work on the Sabbath. It was there to reflect on the goodness of God. But what the religious leaders did is they added all of these man-made rules trying to define what work is.

[11 : 04] And one of the rules was, remarkably, you can't pick up a bed. So they're hitting up this man about it. And he doesn't want to get offside with them. So he says, oh, it's the other guy.

Yeah, totally the other guy. The guy who just healed him. The other guy told me to do that. It's not my fault. It's a bit like Genesis. It's a bit like Adam and Eve.

And God speaks to Adam. And he's like, oh, no, it's the woman. The woman made me do it. The woman that you made, by the way, God. She made me do it. Right? Just blame-shifting. So here's the thing.

Jesus healing this man on the Sabbath and asking him to take up his bed. Jesus didn't have to say, take up your bed. He could have just said, be healed. Snapped his fingers, healed.

The guy could have done whatever he wants. But he specifically said, pick up your bed. And Jesus knew what he was doing. And he knew he was going to escalate a situation. And he knew that healing on the Sabbath was going to force a confrontation.

[12 : 08] Jesus knew that. And he did it on purpose so that he could say things like, verse 17, that Jesus answered them saying, my father is working until now and I am working, which is equating himself with God.

Now, again, the Sabbath is a big concept. I just want to just spend 30 seconds on it. Here, let's go big picture for a moment. Genesis 2 says, God rested on the seventh day. He made everything. He rested on the seventh day of the Sabbath.

God was not tired. He was enjoying his creation. He was soaking it all in. He'd made paradise. He'd made a people for himself. He was enjoying it. And then the whole thing was interrupted by the fall.

And then from then on, God's project has been, is to restore and renew his creation and his people. To remake the world.

And the religious were stuck in their thinking, their formulas. You can't pick up a bed. You can't do this. You can't do that. Well, God's plan is a new humanity, a new creation, a new family to enjoy.

[13 : 13] A new world. Would we be in perfect relationship with our Heavenly Father? Would we be in perfect relationship, face-to-face relationship with our Heavenly Father, with each other, with new hearts that God has given us?

Now, these are very big ideas, I know. But this guy, Brother Paul, he was offered a place in the kingdom. He was offered a place, and, you know, the biggest family in the world, he was offered this. And he turned it down.

And the miracle was this deposit from Jesus, saying, look what I can do. I can heal your body, and I want to heal your heart too. I don't want you to come to God at the end of your life, unprepared to meet your Creator.

I can heal your soul. It was offered term. He messed it up. He took the gift. He rejected the giver. And then he threw Jesus under the bus. It's a really tragic story.

Okay, takeaways. Takeaways. 20 seconds of takeaways here. Very quickly. If you just like one-liners, here we go. I think God has something bigger and grander for you than what you have planned for yourself.

[14 : 37] Whatever great dreams you have for your life, God has something better for you. Bigger than your immediate needs. And it's really important to be mindful of that.

Be present, listening. What is God trying to do in my heart? Not just, God, what can you do for me? I want a girlfriend.

I want a boyfriend. What a nice job. Got a sore knee. Whatever it is. What are you trying to do in here? There are our immediate needs, which of course we keep bringing to God.

That is absolutely fine. Keep doing that. But remember, be mindful. He wants to do a transformative work in your heart that starts now and goes on into eternity.

Amen.