

The Gospel of John

Merit and Mercy

John 5:1-14

INTRODUCTION:

(I had the audience sing this hymn with me.)

There is a Fountain Page 196.

“There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains
Lose all their guilty stains,
Lose all their guilty stains.
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.”

(Pause. Speak as though carefully considering the words)

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel’s veins.

And there was a pool...filled with water...located just outside of Jerusalem near an eastern gate called the “Sheep’s Gate”.

It was called the “**Pool of Bethesda**” and it had a reputation for being a place of healing. That is...if you were fortunate enough to be the **first** into the water.

All Stand and Read Scripture.

John 5:1-14 (NASB)

5 After these things 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 porticoes. **3** In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, [waiting for the moving of the waters; **4** for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.] **5** A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. **6** When Jesus saw him lying *there*, and knew that he had already been a long time *in that condition*, He *said* to him, “Do you wish to get 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, “Get up, pick up your pallet and walk.” **9** Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and *began* to walk.

Now it was the Sabbath on that day. ¹⁰ So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet." ¹¹ But he answered them, "He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Pick up your pallet and walk.'" ¹² They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up *your pallet* and walk?'" ¹³ But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in *that* place. ¹⁴ Afterward Jesus *found him in the temple and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you."

Prayer

BODY:

I. THE POOL OF BETHESDA.

ILLUSTRATION:

For years skeptics claimed that this pool never existed. The very idea of people supposedly going to this pool in the hopes of being "healed" strained the imagination of these critics, and they mocked the belief that this had ever occurred. They concluded that this was just a story made up by John as window dressing.

But then somebody found the pool.

In 1888, there was excavation that took place near a church near Jerusalem, and they found the pool exactly where the Apostle John said it was.

So, we know the pool existed. **(Pause)** But how did it get the reputation of being a place of healing?

Have you ever heard the line "**If you tell a lie long enough eventually people will start to believe it.**"

Well, this is what I think might have happened: I believe the fact that the waters "**were stirred up**" caught the imagination of the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Then, one day, someone said that they'd heard someone say that when the waters were being stirred up, they stepped into the waters and they were healed of a disease. Then someone else said that they had heard that their 2nd cousin on their mother's side had also stepped into waters and they were healed. And then another rumor became added to that... and another rumor... and another rumor. And before you knew it – that pool was the place to go when you needed healed.

People began to crowd around the pool, waiting for the waters to move. The blind, the lame, the paralyzed showed up by the hundreds. But it became obvious that not many of them were healed (if anyone actually was) and the crowds began to experience discouragement... until someone suggested – maybe only the first person into the pool is actually healed.

And since, no one really knew WHO had gotten into the pool first, those who were desperate for healing clung to this little bit of hope. And before you knew it, theory became fact. So the crowds continued to come.

Everyone pushed and jostled their way to the front, hoping to be the first into the pool... leaving guys like the paralytic in our story this morning lying on the pavement, hoping against hope that they might just see the water boil before anyone else and crawl to the water's edge for healing.

II. THE HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC.

Then along came Jesus, and life for the paralytic changed forever. Jesus heals him. The man picks up his mat and walks for the first time in 38 years.

(Pause.) Now, that's a great story.

But there is something confusing about this passage. Jesus is at a pool where there are a multitude of sick and disabled people including a lame man who cannot walk. But Jesus doesn't heal any of them! He just heals this paralytic.

That does not seem right or fair!!! Why does He just heal THIS man? Why not everybody else? I mean, Jesus had healed lots of people during His ministry:

Matthew 15:30 (NASB)

³⁰ And large crowds came to Him, bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them.

It seemed that everywhere Jesus went He was healing nearly everybody who came to Him. But not here. At the pool of Bethesda, there were "**multitudes**" of people wanting to be healed... and He didn't heal them!!! He just healed the paralytic.

Why?

1. Other instances when Jesus healed people...**people knew of Him and came to HIM.** But here at this pool, it seems, nobody even knows who He is. Including the paralytic He healed. For all intents and purposes, Jesus was just another face in the crowd.
2. Everyone at this pool would get their chance to be healed later. This is still the first year of Jesus' ministry. Over the next two years He is going to be preaching and healing people up and down the countryside. And after healing this paralytic, the crowds will leave this unreliable poolside experience and flock to find this man who so obviously healed a man they knew.

So, what's Jesus doing here at the pool? And why would He heal this specific man?

Well, in **John 5:1**, we're told that Jesus has come to Jerusalem "**...for a feast of the Jews**". And the first place He stops is at this pool. There is no scriptural evidence that He came here specifically to heal the paralytic. He only decides to heal this man AFTER He sees him.

John 5:6-7 (NASB)

*⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He *said to him, "Do you wish to get 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."*

AND JESUS HEALS HIM! After the man is healed, a crowd has gathers and Jesus

launches into a powerful sermon about **Who** He is and **why** He is there starting in verse 17 through the end of the chapter which we will cover in later sermons.

Apparently, Jesus used this man to draw the crowd. Essentially the lame man was a [sermon illustration](#). Notice what Jesus says to him in verse 8:

John 5:8 (NASB)

⁸ Jesus *said to him, “Get up, pick up your pallet and walk.”

He could simply have told him – “Get up and walk.” **But no...** He says “Get up, **PICK UP YOUR PALLET**... and walk.”

Why is that important?

III. THE RESPONSE FROM THE JEWS.

Well, this is the Sabbath, and according to the Jews, no one was to work on the Sabbath. The Pharisees (the legalists of the day) had a whole list of things they believed you could not do on the Sabbath...and apparently, on that list, was carrying your mat around.

Jesus was baiting the Pharisees. He was getting their attention. When they see this man walking around with his mat they get upset.

John 5:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet.”

When the Jewish leaders find out it was Jesus who healed the man...they come after Him. And with them comes a large crowd of Jews.

Now, that Jesus has their attention, He uses the lame man as the opening illustration of His sermon. Whoa...wait a minute. You mean that He was just using this paralyzed man as a prop?

There are people who have a hard time with the idea that God would **USE** someone for His purposes. They don't like the idea of God interfering with people's lives.

But that is what God does through His children. And they are blessed because of it.

ILLUSTRATION:

Has anybody here ever heard of a professional wrestler named “Dick de Bruiser”?

Dick de Bruiser's real name was William Afflis. He was an offensive left tackle for the Green Bay Packers from 1950 until 1954 before becoming a professional wrestler and changing his name to Dick the Bruiser. There was much more money to be made wrestling, so he quit the Packers.

One day “the Bruiser” had a match scheduled at “Buck Lake Ranch” near Angola, Indiana. A man went to see him and was surprised when Dick the Bruiser approached him and asked if he would take part in his act. The Bruiser asked him if he could heckle

him during the match. At one point the Bruiser would pretend to get angry with him, come down out of the ring, and toss him across a couple rows of chairs. And he offered to pay him for his cooperation.

So, do you think he accepted? **YOU BET HE DID!!!** Not only did he get to brag that he had been personally thrown across some chairs by “Dick de Bruiser”. He got paid for the privilege!

Now, here in our story, we have a man who gets to be used by Jesus as a sermon illustration. All he has to do is agree to be healed of his paralysis that has imprisoned him in his body for the past 38 years and be forgiven of his sins. **Sounds like a good deal to me!**

But why did Jesus pick THIS specific man to be healed? He could have healed anybody. But He chose this man.

Well one reason Jesus chose him is fairly obvious. When this man got up and walked... there was no question he'd been healed. He'd been lame for **38 YEARS!**

Everybody down at the pool knew who he was. Everybody knew that he couldn't get around without the help of friends. He always had to be carried from one place to another. Everybody **KNEW** he was would **NEVER** walk again. **(Pause) BUT HE DID!**

When Jesus healed this man there was no way anybody could accuse Jesus of having faked this healing. This man wasn't a plant, he wasn't “**part of the act**”. He was a real man who'd suffered from a real disability. This man's healing was the proof that Jesus had the wonderful power to heal.

When Jesus asked him “**Do you want to be healed?**” the man responded: “**I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred...**”

Now think about this: everybody believes that the first person in the pool will be healed. So, what do you think everybody does? They all crowd to the edge of the pool. They push, they shove, they jostle one another to get that prime real estate down close to the water. This guy doesn't stand a chance.

It's always the stronger more agile people who get in ahead of him. And this points to the irony behind the pool at Bethesda. The name Bethesda means “House of Mercy”. It might have been named that because of its reputation for being a place of healing, but in reality, Bethesda was not a “**House of Mercy**”... it was a “**House of Merit**”.

If you weren't quick enough, strong enough, fast enough – you weren't going to get healed. It was a place that was literally designed for the survival of the fittest. The ones who made it into the water were the ones who could **MERIT** their own healing.

The weak were left with little hope. There was no mercy shown there down at this pool. Because, if you weren't strong enough to get the pool first... you were out of luck.

But then Jesus came to Bethesda. The **Lord of Mercy** came to the **House of Mercy**. And He chose a man who had no chance of ever being healed... and He healed him.

(Pause.) Now... there's one last thing. The man at the pool was there, because he had sinned. There was something he'd done 38 years before that crippled him for life.

John 5:14 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁴Afterward Jesus *found him in the temple and said to him, “Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.”

For 38 years, this man had lived with the results of a poor choice he'd made as a young man. For 38 years, he was crippled by a sinful decision that haunted him. For 38 years, he had been imprisoned in his body...because of the sin he'd chosen. But then Jesus came...and healed him. Jesus released him from his body of sin.

CONCLUSION:

Here is the point I want to stress this morning.

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NASB)

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God*; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Now... here's the deal: Many people in this world have their own little "**Pool of Bethesda**".

It's the place where they think they will be healed of the heartaches of this world. It's a house of "**merit**" where they believe - if they can just be strong enough, smart enough, connected enough - they will be able to fix whatever's wrong in their lives.

Just like the people at that pool 2000 years ago they vainly believe their little pool will bring the hope and change they long for. But it never quite happens. After a while they realize they're not as strong, quick, or smart as they thought they were and they're left with a life without hope and change.

The choices they've made, the sins they've committed trap them and rob them of the peace of mind and healing presence of God. All because they're looking for healing at their own little pool...but not at the **fountain - filled with blood drawn Immanuel's veins**.

(Sing solo.)

“There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains
They lose all their guilty stains,
Lose all their guilty stains
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.”

Are you tired of trying to get healed at your own personal "**House of Merit**"? Maybe it's time for you to come to the "**Lord of Mercy**" and receive cleansing at the fountain filled with His blood.

The Family of God.