

MIRACLES OF JESUS

THE LAME MAN (JOHN 5:1-17)

The Pharisees had already seen Jesus perform miracles on the Sabbath. Though they should have been rejoicing over these compassionate acts, they were instead focusing on what day of the week the healings were taking place. According to the Pharisees, the Sabbath as a day of rest meant no one should be “working” by healing people. Jesus, of course, felt differently.

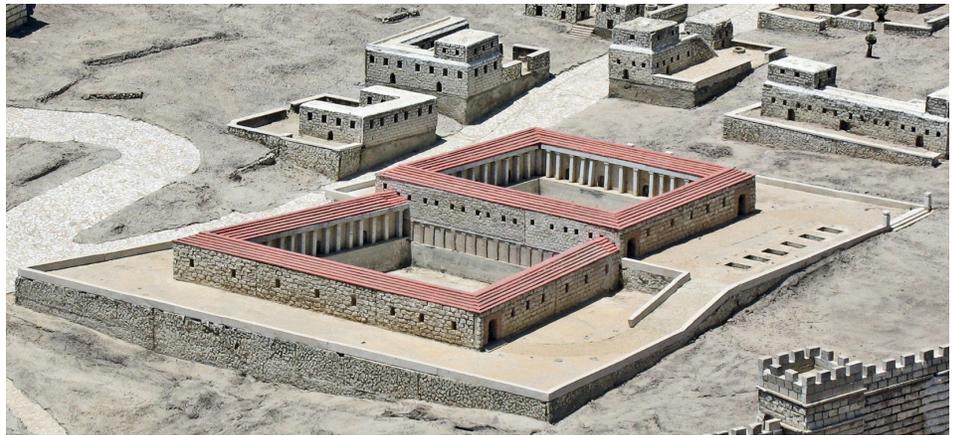
Jesus Heals an Invalid on the Sabbath

Like all ancient cities, Jerusalem was fortified by a series of gates. Near the “Sheep Gate” was the Pool of Bethesda, which was surrounded by five covered colonnades. On the Sabbath, Jesus went there and saw a man who had been sick for 38 years. “Do you want to be healed?” Jesus asked him. He commanded the invalid to pick up his pallet and to walk. Muscles that had long since atrophied suddenly came to life.

It takes nine verses for us to be told that Jesus performed this miracle on the Sabbath (John 5:9c). This was a serious problem to the religious leaders, who began criticizing Jesus for performing miracles on the Sabbath (v. 16). In sharp contrast with their attitude, Jesus taught that the Sabbath was for healing and restoration (see John 7:21-23; Luke 14:1-6).

An Earlier Controversy: Claiming to Forgive Sins

This was not the first time Jesus stirred up controversy after healing a lame man. Earlier in his ministry, while in Capernaum, Jesus had said to a paralytic, “Rise, pick up your bed and go home” (Matt 9:6). But just prior to healing the man, Jesus had first said to him, “Your sins are forgiven.” By healing that lame man, he proved his power to forgive sins. “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” the religious leaders had asked (Mark 2:7). And that’s exactly right: Jesus is the Son of God, and proved it by following his claim to forgive sins with the lame man’s healing.



A model of the Pool of Bethesda (Israel Museum).

“Why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath?”

—John 7:23

A New Controversy: Claiming to Be the Son of God

In this miracle, he made the Pharisees (called “the Jews” in the Gospel of John) equally upset because, not only did he heal on the Sabbath, but he also referred to God as his Father.

But Jesus answered them, “**My Father** is working until now, and I am working.” This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but **he was even calling God his own Father**, making himself equal with God (John 5:17-18).

The Pharisees knew the law of the Sabbath (Ex 20:8-11), but had forgotten why it had been given in the first place.² Instead of rejoicing with the invalid, they completely missed the point of the miracle.

Application

Only Jesus Brings Us To God. Here is the Son of God, seeing all sorts of people who were sick, huddled around a pool they superstitiously believed had healing powers. Little did they know that the Creator of the Universe was walking in their midst (see John 1:3-5). We do something similar when we try to find happiness in other sources besides our relationship with God and his Son.

God and Jesus Are Always Working for Us. Instead of helping people only six days a week, Jesus continued to work through the Sabbath (v. 17). God never takes a break from caring for us.

Jesus Brings Hope to the Hopeless. This man had been sick for years and years. And in one day, Jesus changed this man’s life forever. He then made his way to the temple (v. 14), something which, as an invalid, he had been unable to do (see Lev 21:17-23; 2 Sam 5:8).

We Must Want to Be Made Well. It almost seems like a silly question that Jesus asked the lame man: “Do you want to be made well?” (v. 6). Of course he did! We too must *want* to be made well of our spiritual malady, which is sin.

Sin is Worse Than Sickness. Jesus told the former invalid, “Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you” (v. 14). What could be worse than being sick for 38 years? Being lost for eternity, for sure. But imagine being like the Pharisees and scribes, who opposed the Son of God at every turn and couldn’t rejoice in his gifts of healing (cf. Matt 21:14-15). In fact, this miracle fueled their plot to kill Jesus, all because he had healed a lame man on the Sabbath (v. 18).

John 5:4

You might notice that verse 4 is missing in your Bible’s main text (but it should at least be included as a footnote). That’s because it’s not included in the earliest manuscripts of John’s Gospel. It speaks of the superstition associated with the Pool of Bethesda in the days of Jesus.

² This misplaced piety is demonstrated later in John’s Gospel, when the scribes insist that Jesus’ legs be broken while hanging on the cross. The reason why? Because the Sabbath was about to start and they needed him to die more quickly! (John 19:31).