



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

**Sermon for Easter 6**

May 22, 2022

## Miracle by the Pool

### John 5:1-9

<sup>1</sup> After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. <sup>3</sup> In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water; <sup>4</sup> for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred the water: whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had. <sup>5</sup> One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” <sup>7</sup> The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” <sup>8</sup> Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” <sup>9</sup> And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

As you know, Jesus often spoke in parables, but it could be said that His entire life and ministry were parabolic in the sense that nothing was merely what it seemed; there was always a deeper meaning to the things He did and said. From His birth in a lowly stable, signifying His affinity with the common man, to His innocent death that satisfied the wrath of His Father, thus making all who believe in Him co-heirs of heaven, nothing about Him was confined to its face value. As an infant, He looked no different than any tradesman’s son, yet He was the Savior of all mankind. In His death, He was indistinguishable in His appearance from the criminals hanging beside Him. But, His death was no ordinary passage from this world into the next; it was the fulfillment of the most ancient of all prophecies: God in the Flesh, the Seed of the woman, repairing what Adam, in yielding to temptation, had destroyed. Isaiah wrote of Him: “He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him” (Is. 53:2), and yet, what He did, no one else could ever do. Nothing about Jesus was merely what it seemed.

So it is with the event recorded by St. John in our Gospel today. Those looking on may have been impressed with the miraculous healing. Some, in contrast, were irritated by the timing of it, occurring as it did on a Sabbath. Some may have missed it altogether. But, in any case, what we have here is no mere miracle story. What lies behind the miracle at the pool? Let’s take a look.

First of all, the setting for the event is one of the many festivals celebrated by the Jews. The particular festival is not mentioned, probably because it’s not important. There was a festival in Jerusalem and Jesus went. And while He was there, this thing happened.



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However, what was the point of these festivals? Was it not to remember God's work of redemption in the past and to express their hope and prayer that He would continue to bless them with His presence and favor? So, to mention the context of a feast is a hint that, in the healing that follows, Jesus is doing the same thing His Father had done in the past and thereby demonstrates that He Himself is this very same God of Israel in the flesh.

A word before I move on regarding verse four and the second half of verse three. You may notice in your modern Bible that these verses are left out and relegated to a footnote. Dr. Weinrich indicates that, based on some of the oldest manuscripts, they are likely a later addition. But, Church Fathers of no insignificance, such as Tertullian, Ambrose, and Chrysostom, attest to them, and, as many of us were raised on the King James Bible which includes them, I have included them in our reading.

Let us continue by recalling the purpose for Jesus' appearance among us. Was it not to deal with the problem of sin? The first prophecy regarding the sending of Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ, was a response to the problem of sin. Mankind's relationship with the Creator had been severed through the sinful actions of Adam and Eve, and ever since, we are conceived and born in sin (Ps. 51:5). The image of God has been obliterated and we are therefore broken.

So, the word Jesus uses in addressing the paralyzed man in our text means not just "to be healed," but "to be made whole." Jesus was not simply addressing the man's paralysis; He was addressing the brokenness of his entire nature. "Do you want to be made whole," Jesus asked him. This manner of speaking is similar to how He spoke to the paralyzed man let down through the roof in Luke 5: "Man, your sins are forgiven you" (Luke 5:20). Healing the man's paralysis was not of first importance to Jesus; the first thing He did was to cure him of his sin.

Before sin entered the world, there was no paralysis, there was no illness or disease of any kind. Such things are the result sin and never existed prior to Adam's fall. Death never existed before Adam's fall into sin. That's the issue Jesus primarily came to address. But He also addressed the logical results of that, redeeming also the broken and diseased bodies of those suffering in a world corrupted by sin. He did so, of course, because of His compassion for hurting sinners, but He also did so to draw people's attention to His greater work of redeeming, not just our bodies, but our spirits and souls as well, from the crushing consequences of sin. Jesus was not merely asking the man at the pool if he wanted to be healed of his paralysis; He was asking him if he wanted to be resurrected.

The parabolic nature of this text has been seen at least from the time of St. Augustine, who lived over sixteen hundred years ago. Some of what I'm about to say is going to bend your mind a little, so I encourage you to stay with me. Let's look now at some of the things Augustine observed in our Gospel for today:



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First of all, the multitude of invalids lies among the five roofed colonnades of the Pool of Bethesda. These Augustine understood to represent the five books of Moses. The pool of water he saw as the Jewish people who are “shut in by the five books of Moses.”

Why interpret it this way? Think of it like this: Moses was the lawgiver. In the five books of Moses we have the Law of God laid out before us. The Jews thought they could be saved by observing these laws, but this is impossible. Peter pointed out to the Jerusalem Council that neither they nor their fathers had been able to bear the burden of the Law (Acts 15:10). Any confirmand can tell you what the Law does. It shows us our sin. The Law could only bring forth sick people; it could not heal them, for the Law convicts; it does not absolve. The hymnwriter Paul Speratus captured this in his great hymn *Salvation unto Us Has Come*:

What God did in His Law demand  
And none to Him could render  
Caused wrath and woe on ev'ry hand  
For man, the vile offender.  
Our flesh has not those pure desires  
The spirit of the Law requires,  
And lost is our condition.

To be convinced that keeping the Law can save you, is to be captured – shut in – by a false, misleading dream.

Chromatius of Aquileia, a theologian in the 5<sup>th</sup> century (d. 407), believed that the angel represents Christ, who came to the Jews and by His miracles and teaching “agitated the water (the people) by His presence and stirred [them] up in preparation for His passion.” The miracle in our text sparked yet another Sabbath controversy between Jesus and the Jews. The ongoing nature of this controversy seems to indicate that He was stirring the pool, so to speak, so that He might shake them from their fantasy of self-salvation through the Law.

Here are some more observations from Chromatius:

To go down into the agitated water he equates with “humble faith in the Lord’s suffering and death.”

The 38 years during which the paralyzed man suffered he saw as representing the 38 years between God’s condemnation of those Israelites who refused to enter the Promised Land and when the Children of Israel finally began to enter it. This was a judgment on their sin of rejecting His promise. The paralytic, then, is representative of the new Israel which has awaited Messiah and now receives a new exodus leading to the promised land of heaven.

What about the Sheep Gate? This was the gate through which the animals intended for sacrifice in the Temple were brought into the city. What would it have meant,



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then, when Jesus told these New Testament Jews that He was “the door of the sheep” through whom all who would enter the kingdom of God and be saved must pass?

In the beginning of his Gospel, John declares that Jesus, the enfleshed Word of God, was vitally involved in the creation of the universe. In fact, John says that nothing was made without Him. The language he uses in this account continues that thought. Remember, the multitude of invalids was gathered around this pool for the purpose of being healed/made whole. For the man in this text, it’s not actually the pool that does the healing, it’s Jesus, the Healer sent from above. To “become whole” in the language of John is nothing other than to be “created anew,” and to be created anew is to be born from above, and to be made a disciple of Jesus.

Jesus’ command to the paralyzed man to “rise . . . and walk” was not simply a call for him to stand on his feet and walk around. To hear Jesus say, “Rise, take up your bed, and walk,” is to hear Jesus say, “Become whole” through the removal of your sin. The immediate effect of His command – the man immediately got up, picked up his bed, and walked – reveals the creative power of Christ, who speaks, and what He speaks comes to be. This is the language of creation.

Finally, beloved, how can we hear this account of people descending into the water and being made whole without thinking of Holy Baptism? Isn’t this precisely what happens to us in Baptism? We are literally re-created by the Word of Christ. The Bethesda pool is in every way an image of Baptism. The power of God operating through His angel moved the water of that pool; the power of God operating through His Holy Spirit brings baptismal water to life, thus creating new life and granting it to those being baptized.

The miracle at the Pool of Bethesda provides a rich insight into the many-layered life and ministry of Christ. We would all benefit from reading His Word always with an eye to what is happening behind the scenes, beneath the surface, in His myriad acts of love and service to us. Let us endeavor so to do by God’s grace and favor. In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen