

### John 5:1 – 15

<sup>1</sup> After these things 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, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. <sup>3</sup> In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, [waiting for the moving of the waters; <sup>4</sup> 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.] <sup>5</sup> A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> 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?’ <sup>7</sup> 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.’ <sup>8</sup> Jesus said to him, ‘Get up, pick up your pallet and walk.’ <sup>9</sup> Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day. <sup>10</sup> 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.’ <sup>11</sup> But he answered them, ‘He who made me well was the one who said to me, ‘Pick up your pallet and walk.’’ <sup>12</sup> They asked him, ‘Who is the man who said to you, ‘Pick up your pallet and walk?’’ <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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.’ <sup>15</sup> The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

## Questions

1. Give context: In John 4, Jesus has described himself as the one who has living water, who offers it. Now we're going to meet a man who, for 38 years, has wanted to dip himself into a pool of water to be healed.
2. Describe the setting of John 5:
  - a. What do you see? Lots of disabled people pressed together, discarded
  - b. Smell? Lots of bodies, urine
  - c. Hear? Complaints, moans, cries
  - d. Feel? Hopelessness, crabbiness, etc.
3. What do you think it's been like for the man having laid there for 38 years? He started off hopeful, as if maybe he could make it into the pool or at least be taken care of, but then got jaded. He's become accustomed to being there and asking for pity. His needs are no different from anyone else's. He feels not unique, like he's a part of the mass of people who are not treated as full human beings.
  - a. Israel was in disobedience and complaining for 38 years in the wilderness (Dt.2:14)
  - b. Is this man symbolic of Israel? His complaining for 38 years mirrors Israel's complaining.
4. Why would he stay in this position for so many years without relief? A faint hope. A known place. People to commiserate with.
5. Why does Jesus ask him if he wants to be well? Is Jesus being mean to him? Jesus wants to bring the guy forward, into conversation, into the truth.
6. Why does the man respond with what appears to be his 'standard line'?
  - a. He wants to
    - i. trigger pity (I have no man)
    - ii. and blames others (but while I am coming, another steps down before me).
  - b. He thinks that his healing is mutually exclusive with other people, using this pool and wishful thinking. This is key – often we think that our healing is mutually exclusive with other people's illness, our fortune against their misfortune, so we become even more self-centered.
  - c. He gives a rehearsed, half-hearted answer because it's hard for him to really engage with people anymore. This kind of answer is likely to get sympathy and some money, more than it is patience and assistance to get into the pool. He's gotten used to his problem. He feels sorry for himself. And he's had 38 years to come up with a standard, rehearsed response.
7. Is it possible to get used to your problems, especially if lots of other people share your problem? You just keep feeling sorry for yourself?
  - a. Illus: My housemates and I taking care of a local prostitute, and inviting her over for Thanksgiving. She tried to stay in our house. I said, 'We can't give you the care you need.' She shouted, 'Oh yeah? What care do you think I need?!? I don't need any care!'
  - b. Illus: a homeless man that I once met who didn't want to go to a shelter or clinic
  - c. Illus: Someone who saw self-centeredness as a normal condition, not a broken condition, because everyone else copes with it.
  - d. Illus: from the movie *Shawshank Redemption*, Brooks. He leaves Shawshank prison but has become so accustomed to it that he feels unsafe and overwhelmed by the outside world. He commits suicide. He'd prefer the sad, imprisoned familiar. Similarly, the movie *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* shows that dynamic. As does Israel's first response after being freed from Egypt by Moses and God; they say, "We'd rather go back – at least we had plenty of food back there in Egypt, even though we were slaves."
  - e. Illus: I give rehearsed, pity-invoking responses. In fact, I've had many years trying to perfect the impression I leave on other people. (leader tell a personal story)
8. Where have we seen the water motif connected to Jesus in John's Gospel?
  - a. John 1:16: out of his fullness, we have all received
  - b. John 1: Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus (fills him?)
  - c. John 2: the filling and abundance of the stone water jars represents Jesus in his fullness
  - d. John 4: Jesus says he has living water that he can share with others

9. What does the motif of water connect to Jesus here? Jesus is the rushing geyser of God's healing water. Whatever was going on with this pool was just a small Dixie cup; Jesus is an unlimited, vast ocean of healing water.
10. Why does Jesus abruptly heal him?
  - a. He wastes no time by addressing the man's response. Not interested in excuses or blame.
  - b. He commands him to get up
  - c. He commands him to take up his pallet, the very thing he sat on before.
  - d. He commands him to walk.
11. What might it have felt like for the man to begin walking again?
  - a. Great! He can finally walk!
  - b. Scary: He'll have to learn how to do life in a totally different way. He can't rely on the pity of others anymore. He can't just sit around feeling sorry for himself.
12. What are lessons we can learn from the Sign?
  - a. Jesus will not take our excuses for why we are not well.
  - b. Jesus gives us the power to get up and be well – if we are not it is our block.
  - c. Change is scary and we often choose to stay in our brokenness rather than change.
13. The Jewish leaders enter the story. They arrive like gossip mongers. It is the Sabbath, and the Jewish leaders seem to ignore the miracle and focus on the propriety of carrying a pallet on the Sabbath. Why are they looking to blame someone, rather than seek the source of the healing?
14. Why does Jesus warn the guy when they meet again? Because the guy just 'tattled' on Jesus. He blamed Jesus in front of the Jewish leaders. We'll see Jesus heal a blind man, who does not shift the blame onto Jesus for changing his life. Instead, he fires the question back at the Jewish leaders.
15. Does this guy testify, like the woman at the well in John 4, or the disciples in John 1? No, he just shifts the blame to Jesus for telling him to walk. Continuing to blame others for good things is absolutely rotten and twisted. He's not receiving Jesus' goodness as goodness.

What I wrote to other small group leaders, on John 5 during my senior year of college was:

Hey all you out there again!

Hope last Thursday's meeting went well for you guys. But I just wanted to remind you to be in John 5 from now until Sunday afternoon's mtg and BE THINKING ABOUT THE PASSAGE!!!!

Personally, I really liked how Dorman brought out the human element of the invalid man in his message. The whole problem with that guy was that he was not only sick and powerless, but that he had grown accustomed to his condition. He had gotten comfortable with it. When people approached him, he would give his generic response intended to gain sympathy: "I have no man to put me into the water...."

Maybe the reason he didn't answer Jesus' question, "Do you want to get well," is also because he was basically getting along, he had lived that way for 38 years, and it was a relatively carefree life. People would have compassion on him and feed him, etc. This had to be the case if he had done this for a while.

But notice also that if he was to be healed, he would incur responsibilities. He would have to get a job or find a master because he couldn't live off of other people any more. He couldn't wallow in his self pity anymore and feel sorry for himself. He may even have to look out for others, too.

So perhaps the incentives to get well weren't as clear. I'm sure that he did want to be well. It's possible that he just didn't think it was a real possibility (no faith) or that he didn't want to leave his old lifestyle (no responsibility). In either case, Jesus confronts him on the issue.

Maybe this is the way it is with us. We don't want to come to Christ because we like our old lifestyle in a sense because we can wallow in our self-pity, feel justified in our bitterness toward others for getting to the pool ahead of us, fend only for ourselves, look out for our own self-interest, play off the sympathy of others all our lives, etc. We don't want the responsibility that comes with walking with Christ, with taking responsibility for our own sin.

But the fact is that Jesus does want us to walk with him and to own up to our own sins. That is, in the sense that we realize that our sins are too much for us to handle and we accept the provision God has made for us, and that in walking with Christ, we understand that we now have a responsibility to deal ruthlessly with self-centeredness, self-pity, self-indulgence, self-interest. Jesus enables us to walk, even though sin is the great debilitator that makes us powerless to correct our own situation. Indeed, sometimes sin makes us powerless to recognize our own predicament.

What we see in the narrative, then, is Christ's sovereign mercy. He heals us and enables us to see our predicament even when he's got to pierce our self-focused vision and rehearsed responses to people intended to gain their sympathy. God's mercy penetrates all that.

Bethesda, by the way, means HOUSE OF MERCY.

My volunteer staff worker Ken Fong, wrote back:

Hi Mako,

I just had to share this with you. In the past year, a couple of co-workers and I were doing direct and indirect witnessing to another co-worker Matt Yano. He came to the Easter service at Frost and heard Dorman last year. In the past few months, my prayer partner did some more intense witnessing and invited him several times to her church. He was brought to the point where he had to make a decision, but he stalled.

Last week, I forwarded the excerpt you wrote 'men at pools' to another prayer partner, who left it up on her screen. Matt just happened to walk by and read it. He later told my other prayer partner "That man at the pool is me! I know now that I have to make a decision...and there is no other choice." I now have a new brother in Christ in the officeplace. I thank and praise God for his awesome plan and for using you at the right time even though you had no idea that the excerpt would be used like that.

Strangely, in my re-tasking that is going on, I will be working more with Matt in orbital analysis. In the work situations that are coming up, there may be a lot of periods where Matt and I will be isolated in secure facilities (waiting for a test to complete) with nothing to do (but talk?) Pray that I could develop a trustful relationship.

Thanks bro!

--Ken