

Seven Miraculous Signs of Jesus

John 5:1-15 Jesus heals a paralysed man

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I have a geometrical puzzle for you this morning. We're making our way through the 7 miraculous signs in John's Gospel. We've arrived at Miracle Number 3, John chapter 5, in which Jesus heals a paralysed man. The apostle John is very specific about the location:

*"now there is in Jerusalem near the sheep gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is **surrounded by five covered colonnades**." (John 5:2)*

A covered colonnade is a long outdoor corridor where people can shelter from the hot Mediterranean sun. And John is very specific this pool had five of them, not 4. My geometrical question is this: what shape was the pool if it had five colonnades?

The answer is a rectangular pool split with a colonnade down the middle.

In the 1800s, the pool of Bethesda was used by critics as evidence that the Gospel miracles were myths. "John is just making up these stories. Miracles can't happen, we now live in an age of science, and science teaches that miracles are impossible." Here is one of the critics:

*"The incident of the sick man at the pool of Bethesda (wrote the prominent German sceptic David Friedrich Strauss) serves to present Jesus as the divine dispenser of true life, who can do that which the legal washings and the fabled healing virtues of the water were unable to accomplish. The narrator uses the story **not as an objective chronicle**, but to demonstrate that in Jesus, God's grace supersedes the old dispensation."*

John has fabricated this miracle, and one of the proofs critics used was the mention of a five-colonnade pool which had never been found.

But archaeologists found the pool of Bethesda late 1880s and guess what? It has five covered colonnades, just as John describes.

And guess what? You can visit the pool today. Three lessons:

- (1) **Everything in the Bible is true!** We can be confident that we have the Word of God in our hands.
- (2) **Science does not contradict the Bible.** Critics like Strauss completely misunderstood science—they thought that science and miracles are like oil and water, they can't go together. But there is not a line, not an equation, not a sentence in the book of science that contradicts the possibility of miracles.
- (3) **Thirdly patience.** If there is a historical detail in the Bible which hasn't yet been uncovered by

archaeologists, all we need do, wait.

Back to this wonderful story in John chapter 5 and to **the place** of this healing:

*“Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here **a great number** of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time.....”*

Imagine the scene? Many poorly folk, along with family members and, no doubt, curious onlookers.

There was a widely held view that when the surface of the waters were agitated, stirred, the first person into the pool would be healed. So family members would keep an eye on the waters and at the first sign of a disturbance they'd carry their sick family member down into the pool—quickly! Whether this was true or legend, we cannot tell, but in the age before medicine, I would have been there with our sick family member.

The Man

In that sea of people, was a paralysed man, who had lost the use of his legs, he could not walk. He had been this way for 38 years but we have no idea how he became paralysed. It does not seem as though this was congenital illness he was born with because John tells us in chapter 9 that the blind man was born blind. Was it an accident in childhood? Did he fall down a well? Was he injured at work? We're not told.

But 38 years is a long long time.

And with such an injury, there would have been no prospect of employment (that's why many sick people begged), and no chance of marriage or family life. This man was doomed to live out a purposeless life. One dreary day would follow another.

To compound his sorrow, we also learn that he has no-one to help him, verse 7: While other sick people have come with family and friends ready to carry their sick into the troubled waters, this man is alone. Did his friends and family join him in the early years, we wonder, 38 years ago, and then one by one, give up, leaving him to himself, dreary day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year and decade after decade?

In our minds eye, we see him, every morning, dragging himself to the pool of Bethesda, or perhaps friends carried him there and then left him. When the waters are troubled we see him starting to drag himself into the pool, but alas, without help, someone always beats him. After now, 38 years, he's lost all hope:

“Sir, I have no-one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in (by himself), someone else goes down ahead of me.”

The Healer

This man’s plight **would** be **altogether hopeless**, if it were not for the Healer who showed up that day.

“Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time.”

Jesus was wandering around the pool, possibly on his own, or with just a few disciples (because he’s able to slip away quietly we read). He notices this lonely figure, and it seems as to me that he asked around, “Tell me about that man over there.” “Oh he’s been paralysed for 38 years.”

Of all the sick people around those colonnades, Jesus seeks out what must have been one of the more hopeless cases around the pool, that Sabbath day.

Let me tell you four things about the Healer, because the story is not really about the Pool, it’s not primarily about the Man— or the miracle - this story is about Jesus Christ, the divine Healer.

(1) Jesus loves the outsider

Jesus loves the one else notices, or cares about, not even family or friends. He was famous for this:

“The Pharisees and teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” (Luke 15:1-2) (“Sinners” were people on the margins of Jewish society, druggies, prostitutes, that kind)

Who did Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce invite to their New York wedding two weeks ago? The poor, the dispossessed, the drug-addicts? No, A-list celebrities, as well as their family.

Who does Jesus invite to his Gospel banquet?

‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’ (Luke 14)

When we invite people into your home for a meal, which is the joy and privilege of every Christian, and the duty of every elder, who do we invite?

“Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” Luke 14.

The heart of Jesus is for the outsider, and so should your heart and so should mine.

God spare us from the curse of being a middle-class church. I choose my words carefully. Too many evangelical churches like this one become ghettos for educated, middle class people. May we open our hearts and arms and homes to everyone! You are welcome here no matter what your background! (Even if you are middle-class).

What's Jesus like? He has a heart for the outsider.

(2) Jesus takes the initiative

Jesus takes the initiative. This man does not seek out Jesus, Jesus, seeks out him.

On the surface, asks him, seems, strange question:

"Do you want to get well?"

Isn't the answer obvious Jesus?! Why does he come to the healing pool every day if he doesn't want to be healed? But is the question really odd? Perhaps this man has settled into despair? Perhaps sitting by the pool every day has become a meaningless habit or tradition? He does not really expect to be healed! He's resigned himself to an empty purposeless life!

If no-one steps in to heal, he is doomed! Jesus takes the initiative and reaches out to him!

This is how Jesus deals with all of us, Jesus always takes the initiative. Left to ourselves we would be lost. But the Good Shepherd leaves the 99 and searches for the lost sheep.

*I once was lost in darkest night
Yet thought I knew the way
The sin that promised joy and life
Had led me to the grave
I had no hope that you would own
A rebel to your will
And **if you had not loved me first**
I would refuse you still*

"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: **while we were still sinners**, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) Jesus made the first move. Even when we think we made the first move, he was secretly drawing us to himself. Grace is always prevenient.

(3) Jesus brings new life!

Jesus loves the outsider, Jesus takes the initiative, thirdly, Jesus brings new life.

Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” 9 At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.”

In an instant, the bodily damage was repaired, in an instant strength was restored, in an instant learning how to walk without falling over was imparted to his brain. He got up, folded his mat and walked away! What awesome wonderworking power! What divine power!

Now he could go home and live again! He could find a job, he could be restored to friends, he could live!

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come, said Jesus, that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10)

When he began his ministry, Jesus said he was called...

“to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (Luke 4)

Jesus does not promise to heal us bodily in this life, and we may pass through many sorrows and trials, but he has promised never to leave us or forsake us, he gives us the comfort of his Spirit, the loving support of our church family around us, and the hope of a glorious new body in the new heavens and new earth to come. Thank you Lord for the new and abundant life you give to your children!

Jesus loves the outsider, Jesus takes the initiative, Jesus brings new life and finally:

(4) Jesus heals the soul

After this man was healed, he was harassed by the religious leaders for carrying his mat (that’s a whole other story!) Jesus went looking for him again:

“Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” (14)

Jesus is not saying that this man’s condition was caused by his personal sin, he was saying that if his sin problem was not dealt with, if he did not repent of his sins and turn to God for forgiveness, something far worse than bodily illness would come upon: he would one day go to hell. What’s the point of healing the body which is mortal but not healing the soul which lives forever?

Jesus came into the world, primarily to heal our souls: to suffer and die on a cross for our sins so that we would not face the judgement we deserve, but enjoy the salvation of eternal life as a free gift.

And today Jesus offers to everyone the free gift of salvation to anyone who will acknowledge that they are a sinner in need of forgiveness.

We're not told if this man's soul was healed. Make sure ***you*** receive the greater blessing of a healed soul, by believing in Jesus Christ today.

Amen