

## The Third Sign from the Book of John

### Signs

Semeion say-mi'-on from Semaino see-mah'-ee -no - to signify a legal term used in evidence or a scientific term used in a proof.

#### The Healing at the Pool of Bethesda

1Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. 2Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. 5One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

7"Sir," the invalid replied, "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."

8Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." 9At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, 10and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."

11But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' "

12So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?"

13The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

14Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." 15The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

#### Life Through the Son

16So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. 17Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." 18For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

19Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. 20For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. 21For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. 22Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, 23that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

24"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. 25I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

**26For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. 27And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.**

### **Structure of John's Gospel**

- In the prologue, John presents the life of Jesus.
- In Chapters 1 – 4, Jesus presents himself to the Jews as Messiah
- The fifth chapter marks a major division in the Gospel of John.  
In Chapter 5, John begins to trace a growing rejection of the claims of Jesus, and a growth of angry hostility in official circles against the ministry of the Lord.
- John focuses the rejection around three miracles of healing by Jesus:  
Chapter 5 - the healing of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda.  
Chapter 9 - the account of the opening of the eyes of the man born blind.  
Chapter 11 - the greatest of Christ's miracles, the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

### **Chapter 5: Healing at the pool of Bethesda**

**1Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. 2 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. 3 Here a great number of disabled people used to lie - the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. 5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.**

For many years the site of this pool was lost, covered with the debris of the centuries, around 1967 it was discovered and excavated. The pool is located to the north part of the Temple Mount, near what is now called St. Stephen's Gate, which is, in fact, the site of the Sheep Gate mentioned here. In these porches, set at various levels around the pool, during our Lord's time it was the habit of many to gather during feast days, hoping for a healing miracle.

If you have any Bible other than the King James Version you will notice that Verse 4 is missing. Many versions include the verse in a footnote which explains why these people were there.

They believed that from time to time when the water was troubled -- when it would rise rapidly and then sink again -- that this was caused by an angel who visited the pool, and the first man who got into it when it was so troubled would be healed.

The pool of Bethesda, like many similar pools in the Jerusalem area, is an intermittent spring. At times water is released in surges from hidden reservoirs in the hills around the city, causing the pool to rise and fall suddenly. The people believed that if they managed to be the first to enter the pool after the disturbance of the water, that they would be healed.

Undoubtedly healings did occur there. Even today healings take place in these special areas where people go, believing they can be healed. Most of these healings have a psychological basis. When people believe they are going to be healed, and they are in a place where healings supposedly occur, and they do the expected thing, many of them are healed. Thus the pool at Bethesda had established a reputation as a place where people could be healed.

So here was a great crowd of people -- paralyzed, blind, lame, sick -- all waiting for the water to be troubled. Out of that crowd Jesus picked one lone man. He did not empty the five porches, healing everybody. He did not invite them all to come down so that he might lay hands on them; nothing of that sort. He went to only one man.

John goes on to say what Jesus did:

**6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"**

What a strange question to ask of a man who had been sick for 38 years! "Do you want to be healed? But Jesus never asked a foolish question in his life. Obviously it was important for this man to answer (at least to himself) the question, "Do I want to be healed?"

There are many people who do not want to be healed. They do not want to receive divine help in their problems. They have no desire to be helped out of their weakness. Some of them have some sort of love for their problem, weakness or helplessness.

They may crave the attention of others through their helplessness. They may reject assuming any responsibility for their own lives. They may turn their backs on a way of deliverance because they do not want to be healed.

### **A lesson:**

You cannot help somebody who does not want to be helped and if the man had indicated he did not want to be helped, Jesus probably would not have helped him.

We can be certain as our Lord moves among us that he will only ask this question of those who want to be healed. He will say nothing to those who do not.

But the man at the pool of Bethesda wanted to be healed. Notice his answer:

**7 "Sir," the invalid replied, "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."**

He said, "Yes, I want to be healed, but I cannot. I've tried. I've done everything I know how. I want to get into that water, I want to be healed, but I lack the ability. I have no hope."

Many people have given up hope their condition can change. They have resigned themselves to being weak, failing and faltering Christians for the rest of their lives.

### **The critical moment of this story:**

What did Jesus say to a man who had lost all hope, a man who had given up on himself?

He had lots of options.

- First, he asks an impossible thing.
- Secondly, he removes all possibility of a relapse.

- Thirdly, he expects a continued success.

All these are involved in the words,

**8Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." 9At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.**

The first thing Jesus says to do is what the man could not do, what he had tried for 38 years to do.

- He told him to Rise.
- Actually, he told him to have enough faith to rise.
- He asked him to do an impossible thing.

Then what? The Lord said "take up your pallet." He wanted the man to remove all possibility of and to make no provision for relapse. He was saying something very important to those who are seeking help, "Do not make any provision to go back on what you have done."

The big thing: "walk." Do not expect to be carried -- walk. Jesus expected continued success from the man. If Jesus gives us the power to rise, Jesus is the One who can give us the power to walk every day, to keep going.

John now traces the immediate reaction of others to this event:

**The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, 10and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."**

**11But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' "**

**12So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?"**

Now the man is in trouble over the Sabbath restrictions.

John starts to trace the beginning of the movement that ended in the death of Jesus, the beginning of the official rejection of the Messiah. This was introduced by what seemed to the leaders of the Jews, and probably everybody else too, to be a perfectly proper concern. The Law of Moses did say that the Jews were to keep the Sabbath and not do any work on that day.

The rabbis had carefully studied that regulation, and, probably innocently and with good intentions, had spelled out 39 different ways by which the Sabbath could be violated by certain types of work. One of those ways was carrying any kind of a load on the Sabbath day. Jeremiah 17 had warned against this. He specifically said, "Do not bring any burden out of your houses on the sabbath day," (Jer 17:22). Thus there was some merit and justification for their intervention in this case.

The man is in trouble. The Law said that anyone caught bearing a burden on the Sabbath was to be stoned. This punishment was not often carried out, but still the man is in real trouble. Notice that the minute this new believer gets in trouble, this man whom Jesus has touched, blessed and healed, Jesus is there. Verse 13:

**13The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.**

**14 Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."**

That is a wonderful word, "Jesus found him." The man had gone to the temple because the Law required that one who had been healed had to make a thanksgiving offering. Jesus knew where to find him.

Notice the order of what Jesus said to him; it is very important. He did not say to the man, shaking his finger, "Sin no more. If you do you will lose your healing." No, he said, "See, you are made whole."

Jesus never says, "Sin no more," unless he first says, "You are made whole." He calls the man's attention to the fact that not only had he been physically healed, he had been spiritually healed. His sins had been forgiven; he had been washed, he had been cleansed; he was a new man – physically and spiritually. His soul was made whole. To that person who has received the gift of wholeness from God, without any merit or earning on his part, to that person, Jesus says, "Sin no more."

Our Lord raises a lamp of warning here; even being healed by Jesus will not guarantee that you will not have your problem return. "Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you."

John gives a final word about this incident in Verses 15-17:

**15 The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.**

**Life Through the Son**

**16 So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him.**

From here on this was their justification for their persecution of Jesus -- they could hide behind what looked like a violation of the Law. They had heaped all these regulations on the Sabbath law, but Jesus ignored them frequently because the regulations were "the tradition of men," {Mark 7:8}. Now they had an excuse that made their persecution of him look valid.

Jesus explains why he breaks the tradition:

**17 Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."  
18 For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.**

Jesus is saying, "You go back to Moses and to all that the rabbis have added to his Law. But I want to go back further than that: God is at work; God is doing this. The merciful and compassionate God has found this man. He is working and I am his instrument. That is why I am doing this."

That is one of the most profound statements in the Gospel of John.

The secret of meaning in any life is finding out what God is doing and working with him, thus you become an instrument of the moving of God through history.