

“Chosen” – John 5:1-18

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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John 5:1-18 After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. 3 In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame,

paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. 4 For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. 5 Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" 7 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." 8 Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." 9 And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath. 10 The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed." 11 He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'" 12 Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" 13 But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. 14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." 15 The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. 16 For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. 17 But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." 18 Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.

As we look back upon the events that have thus far transpired in the life and ministry of Jesus, we can start to see a pattern emerging. A form or method in His approach to missional activity. From the eyes of the unobservant or even the passing dally of the curious onlooker, one could miss the artist's design...the master's recipe. To the eyes of the masses, it might appear that Jesus was meandering about the middle east with nothing more than a pre-60's hippy disposition...embracing the freewheeling "Rambling Jack Elliot" lifestyle. Wearing the mantle of poet and philosopher...pacifist and guru...complete with groupies and the nomadic proclivity.

Yet with an attentive heart and a seeking mind, one would instead begin to see a form, a convention, a symphony at the hand of a maestro. For with a closer look at the journeys of Christ one would begin to see that His path was not one of random and freelance, but rather expeditions with lofty yet specific goals. Quests to "seek and find that which is lost." But the participants were never "lost" in so much as that word speaks of one's locale. Jesus knew where they were. Individuals plucked from the masses. Chosen before the foundations of the world were formed, lives moving steadily toward a spiritual crescendo. That moment of "perfect storm" when all the aspects of our lives are like planets aligned to create that great momentous occasion; *our meeting with Jesus.*

When that day...that moment arrives, it seems ...perhaps now only in hindsight, that time around us stops. For the rest of the world just seems to go on...continuing about the business of living, the material and the flesh. It's like for a moment we are invisible to the rest of the world as we play out a waking dream.

Our minds flood back today to the stories that have transpired, and the dawning slowly settles upon us: the woman at the well...the demon possessed men at the tombs...the calling of Matthew the tax-collector...the healing of the leper...Jairus' daughter...that woman with the "issue of blood." Increasingly the evidence says to us that these were not meetings of mere chance. They were not random coincidences...some sort of 'cosmic luck.' Rather they were ordained crossroads. Pinnacle moments for these few and chosen individuals.

But why these? Certainly it seems that the world at that time was full of the diseased...the blind, the leper, the demonically possessed. Jesus must have passed hundreds of people every day that were lost, broken, and alone. What made these individuals different? What made their situations "pop?"

As Jesus made His way through the sick and broken by the pool of Bethesda...if we read the story in the correct light, He suddenly stopped at *one man*. We have every reason to believe that there would have been a multitude of individuals there beside that pool, and yet our record gives us just one stop on His "whistle tour" that day.

For many years...as with much of the scriptures in general, this story was thought of by critics as a work of fiction...a fabrication, or at the very least a distortion of the specific events. Scholars have long debated the authenticity of verse 4, as the oldest and best manuscripts do not contain the passage concerning the angel that would stir the waters, rather it is thought to have been added by a later scribe in an effort to explain or elaborate on the generally understood cause of the "waters stirring" and thus the perceived healing properties or the occasional healings that occurred there.

There is also the fact that for many years no such "pool" was located in ancient Jerusalem and therefore such was dismissed on historical grounds. The pool is described as having five porticoes—a very unusual feature suggesting a five-sided pool, which most scholars dismissed as an unhistorical literary creation. Yet when this site was finally discovered and excavated, it revealed a rectangular pool with two basins separated by a wall—thus a five-sided pool—and each side had a portico; a covered colonnade in Greek architecture.

But the existence of this structural fact...while lending credibility to the physical existence of such a location, still lacked the spiritual footprint. Is there any convincing or persuasive evidence that anything supernatural had gone on there in the realm of the medicinal?

Again, further archeological excavating has found strong evidence that the pool of Bethesda was home to the worship of the pagan god Asclepius (*Asklēpiós*) who had strong medicinal ties and aspects. Thus the sick people who had settled in on the porches around the pool of Bethesda had no doubt come to try their luck here as part of their quest for healing via yet another Greek 1st century method. The King James gives us that verse 4 about the "angel stirring the water." Such historical nuance, no matter from where it originated, must have held at least some truth or legend.

However, this 'element' or 'occurrence' does not specify as to just where this angelic entity was supposed to have originated from. And we all know that according to scripture that Satan and his demons often present themselves as "angels of light." All of this would easily present a scenario wherein there would be many there seeking healing and many that would have, over the passing of time, given up all hope for any kind of healing, and were in affect just there waiting to die. All of them just waiting. Waiting for something or someone to happen to get them out of their situation.

How bold of Jesus to purposely walk into the turf of the enemy! Fearless and unapologetic, Jesus faced the foes of God and kingdom head on. One can easily imagine the picture of a contemplative Jesus strolling through the porches...stepping around the multitude of humanity laying in wait. All hoping, waiting, seeking some respite...some relief.

“Do you want to be made well?” In response to Jesus’ question, we read an answer that was anything but hopeful. In the words of the sick man, *“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.”* (vs. 7) The stirring up of the water was likely happening when the priests of the Asclepius cult, would open the connecting pipes between the higher and the lower portions of the pool of Bethesda. The water in the upper reservoir would then flow...moving into the lower one... *“stirring the waters”* below.

The man’s initial response was hardly the answer that Jesus was looking for, nor was it really an answer at all. In fact, his reply was more in the form of an excuse than the emphatic reply one would expect after 38 debilitating years! The great Scottish bible scholar Marcus Dods once remarked, “not always are the miserable willing to be relieved.” How common is this man’s rely even today. Jesus, and even the voices of His church, are asking “do you want to be well?” and just as in this story, the replies come back *“...you don’t understand...I have this addiction...I have this difficult and complicated family situation...I have to work...I have this girlfriend, this boyfriend...I have this financial state, etc and etc.”*

Others will bow out because they are looking for someone to do all the heavy lifting for them. Their replies go something like this: *“...will Jesus get me out of jail or off probation?...will Jesus make me feel good all the time?...will I have all the money I need?...will everything in my life roll smoothly if I act?”* It’s the entrenched mentality of ‘government assistance’ that is so prevalent in our culture. They want a “welfare Jesus.” They are saying *“I have nobody to help me...”* Jesus offered no such warranty or “food stamps” for living. He simply told the man...in the ESV version, **“Get up.”** *“Pick up your bed and walk.”* Jesus was offering the healing, but the gift was not without personal action on the part of the receiver.

He told Simon the fisherman **“follow me.”** He told the men and the Cana wedding **“fill the Jars with water.”** To Nicodemus, *“you must be born again.”* To the woman at the well **“drink of the water that I give...”** To the nobleman whose son was sick and dying **“go...you son will live.”** To the cleansed leper **“go and show yourself to the priest...”** To the scribe who was interested in following Him He said **“follow me...let the dead bury the dead.”** To the paralytic, **“rise...pick up your bed and go...”** To Matthew the tax-collector **“follow me...”**

Get up...go...follow...drink...**be**. Not in every case do we have record of such directives, but it seemed that Jesus most often asked the recipient to act in his or her faith. Was the key that set these individuals apart from the rest, simply their willingness to get up? To move in faith? To obey? Because on this occasion we have record of only one man being healed out of all the sick and broken crowd there that day. Does such not separate even today those who are transformed...the ‘one’ out of so many, who receives His healing? Is Jesus with you here today saying “get up?”

What followed next is what always seems to follow the work of Jesus. There were those who rejected such miraculous work, not because of the **result** but because of how it was done! Both in the world, and sadly even much of the religious world, there is always those who will have their feathers ruffled because what Jesus did does not fit into the tightly held parameters of their world. It defies their logic and flies in the face of the rules of the game. *“You can’t be a Christian...you are too messed up. You’re in jail...you’re an addict...you don’t look right...you don’t dress right...you don’t go to our church or part of our denomination.”*

People who inexplicably and maybe even inadvertently are saying to the man who is down and broken “*you stay there...*” “*Stay there until you get it together...stay there until you can know and follow the guidelines.*” When the truth, according to Christ, comes down to this: “*Do you want to be healed? Then get up. Get up and walk...*” He will do the miraculous. You just have to stand up and move.

Jesus’ reply to these boys was that ‘*Dad was bringin’ it*’ and so ‘*He was going to bring it too.*’ He had no regard for their “you can’t do that” principles or their religious straightjackets. And yet notice their reaction to such miraculous healing! They did not rejoice or support the work. No, they hated Jesus for it! They despised the apostles along with Christ for precipitating such redemption and healing, because Jesus and the boys did not follow the preconceptions...the traditions and formulas, that the entrenched religionists had invented in their minds.

And so such backlash continues today. The pagan world on the right and the self-righteous religionist on the left. The world hating you for pulling the lost out of the pit they live in, thus inadvertently dis’ing **them** and **their** lives. The religionist rejecting and despising you for not doing things the way they way they think it ought to be done, thus, again, inadvertently dis’ing **them** for the lack of real spiritual success by trying to put God in a box.

I had a close spiritual friend at one point in my life that departed from my life for this very reason. He wouldn’t see the lives redeemed...the healing power of God...the broken restored, and instead became very angry because we as a church rejected the mores of denominationalism, hierarchy and proper social protocol. Instead of showing a spirit of wonder and amazement for the healing of the broken, he became like the Pharisees of Jesus’ day...insulted that we rejected the religious status quo. Jesus was a straight-shooter. He rejected religious permission slips and hall passes. He just aimed to be about the Father’s business, and they killed Him for it.

The winning events that transpired here in this account all occurred because everyone practiced obedience. Jesus obeyed the Father by get out there and doing His work...even on a Sabbath, and the man obeyed by getting up and walking. This event occurred because Jesus and the man were more in tune with obedience than a man-designed recipe for how *those outside* thought things ought to be handled.

The man did not enter a rehab program or convalescent care facility. Once again I quote Marcus Dods who said, “the Lord did not make a provision for a relapse.” Jesus told the man to *pick up* his bed and walk. That illustrates a beautiful spiritual truth. Because when Jesus saves a man, He saves him whole. He does not make provision for a relapse. If the man was really healed, he would not be coming back. He was burning his bridges. There would be no return!

The man in the story was chosen out of so many. Not because he was special or had taken the special classes or read the correct books. He was chosen because he *believed*. And most importantly he believed enough to act. He got up and walked away. It was his crucible. It was the crossroads of his life. It was his meeting with the master.

Is Jesus standing over you this morning? Is this your day?

Get up and walk...