

All Signs Point to Jesus

Session 3

March 16, 2025

The Sign of His Authority

The Point: Jesus works in a way that goes beyond our expectations.

Session Passages: John 5:1-11,17-20

John 5:1-7

Connection to the Point. A disabled man assumed that, if Jesus helped him, it would be nothing more than assisting him into the water.

A Jewish festival (v. 1). People have debated which festival is intended. Some believe it was one of the three primary feasts (Passover, Tabernacles, and Pentecost, Deut. 16:16). Others suggest the Feast of Purim, celebrating God's use of Esther to rescue the Jews from being killed by the Persians. Any attempt to identify the festival with certainty, though, is speculation. John's emphasis was not on the festival but on what occurred at the pool.

Went up to Jerusalem (v. 1). This phrase describes Jerusalem's higher elevation than the surrounding area and spotlights the city's significance; Jews believed Jerusalem was the center of the world.

The Sheep Gate (v. 2). Nehemiah mentioned the *Sheep Gate* being rebuilt and dedicated to God (Neh. 3:1). Through this gate into a *market* or holding area came sheep that were to be sacrificed in the nearby temple. The gate was the connection between ancient Jerusalem and the Kidron Valley. Even today, an open-air sheep market operates one day a week just outside this gate.

Bethesda (v. 2). The name of a pool, coming from a combination of two Hebrew words: *beth*, which means "house" and *hesed*, which means "mercy." "House" suggests the presence of a structure. People came to this "House of Mercy" for healing. The pool collected rainwater and had two basins: the northern one measured about 174 by 131 feet, and the southern, 154 by 171 feet.

Five covered colonnades(v. 2). A wide walkway or porch was covered by a column-supported roof common in Greco-Roman construction. There being five *colonnades* puzzled biblical scholars for some time. Archaeologists helped clear the confusion; the colonnades ran along the four sides of two pools and in between the two—thus, five. John's description was accurate. The five colonnades provided ample space for the many infirmed people who came there (v. 3).

The blind, the lame, and the paralyzed (v. 3). John could not have picked people with more hopeless circumstances. The *blind* couldn't see the water stir. The *lame* (crippled, Acts 3:1-10) and *paralyzed* (something that is dried, withered, shrunken, Mark 3:3) couldn't get to it when it did.

Stirred up water (vv. 3b-4). Many translations omit these verses or include them as a note. They are not in the earliest Greek manuscripts and are possibly a later addition. The Bible accurately reflects the

belief among the Jews (see v. 7) of healing powers in the water once it was agitated by an angel. However, the Bible does not suggest that such belief was valid, much as one can acknowledge a contemporary urban legend without holding it to be true.

Disabled for thirty and eight years (v. 5). Whereas the official's son from last session was at the point of death (4:46-47), this man's seemingly never-ending condition forced him into what he might have perceived as a living-death existence. His having been disabled so long helped authenticate Jesus's miracle as being genuine; no one could say the man had simply gotten over a temporary difficulty.

Jesus saw him lying there (v. 6). John focused on Jesus's habit of ministering to the weak and wounded, sick and sore rather than giving His attention to elite, wealthy, and religiously powerful people. He went to the place where those seen as the most hopeless and helpless, the pitiful and pathetic found themselves day after day.

Jesus . . . realized (v. 6). John did not indicate Jesus knew the man. Yet, Jesus showed He knew more about this man than John had revealed. This supernatural knowledge spotlighted His divine nature.

Do you want to get well? (v. 6). Rarely do we see Jesus asking someone if they wanted a miracle. Jesus's question reminds us some people become comfortable in their misery. For Jesus this was not a pointless question; it certainly got the man's full attention. The man did not see, though, that Jesus was offering to put His compassion into action. The word translated as *well* occurs in John's Gospel only concerning this man's healing (vv. 4,9,11,14,15; 7:23). It carries the idea of having a sound or healthy body.

No one . . . to put me into the pool (v. 7). John did not describe the man's condition. Verse 5 indicates he had a disability. This verse says he would have needed assistance getting to the water. It reveals two things: first, the man's focus was on his helpless condition—his ailment eclipsed any hope this man had. Second, the man imagined only that Jesus might lower him into the water. But Jesus worked far beyond and better than the man ever expected.

When the water is stirred up (v. 7). What caused the water to stir? Archaeology gives insight. The two pools were connected by a gated channel (called a "sluice") and an underground pipe. Neither was visible from above. These helped control the overflow from the upper to the lower pool. When the sluice opened, the water would stir.

John 5:8-11

Connection to the Point. Jesus healed the man, going beyond what the man expected.

Pick up (v. 8). Jesus completely ignored the man's statement about having no help to enter the pool, and did nothing to correct the man's superstitious thinking. He knew debate would have been pointless. Jesus's words show He gave no credence to the popular claims that the pool had healing powers. The Greek verb used here is an imperative (that is, a command); the tense applied to a one-time action, not

one that would need to be repeated. Never again would the man need to gather up the mat intended to ease his discomfort while waiting for healing from his infirmed condition.

Get up . . . and walk (v. 8). These are again imperative verbs; however, they appear in a different tense and speak of continuous actions. The man would repeatedly need to arise from his resting position, and he would need to keep on walking. He would not be returning to his customary place poolside tomorrow, and would no longer have constraints on his moving about.

Got well . . . picked up . . . started to walk (v. 9) were not the actions of someone infirmed, crippled, blind, or paralyzed; but they were the obedient responses of the now able-bodied man. The man gained these abilities because of the power in Jesus's spoken words. As God had spoken at creation, here Jesus spoke at the re-creation of this formerly infirmed man. As John had said of Jesus, "In him was life" (1:4).

His mat (v. 9). The word translated as *mat* typically refers to inexpensive bedding made of straw. This type of pallet, which any person in relatively good health could easily roll up and transport, was commonly used by destitute people.

That day was the Sabbath (v. 9). In Hebrew the word *shabbath* and in Greek *sabbaton* each means to cease or halt. All four Gospels highlight the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities because of His views and activities related to the Sabbath (Matt. 12:9-14; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 14:1-6). This escalating tension contributed to the religious authorities' determination to have Jesus killed (see John 5:18).

The Jews said to the man (v. 10). Although various translations differ in their count, John's Gospel uses the phrase *the Jews* or something similar significantly more times than the other three Gospels. John employs the phrase around sixty times; the other three Gospels use the term fewer than ten times each. Although the term can refer simply to followers of Judaism (John 3:1), John often employed it to describe the religious authorities who actively opposed Jesus (7:1). It is in that sense we encounter it here. Interestingly, the religious leaders in this instance directed their ire at the man whom Jesus had healed rather than at Jesus Himself, who had healed the man. Soon enough, the focus of their attention would shift.

The law prohibits (v. 10). The fourth commandment prohibits working on the Sabbath, but the text does not define "work" (Ex. 20:8-11; 31:12-15; 35:2). Honoring the Sabbath was an externally identifying trait for the Jews, setting them apart from other people around them. Thus, through the years, Jewish leaders amassed thirty-nine types of work that they considered prohibited on the Sabbath. These laws, included in "the tradition of the elders," were passed down orally through the generations before eventually being put into written form in about AD 100. These laws included the prohibition of moving an article from one place to another on the Sabbath. The law specifically stated that a bed could be moved on the Sabbath only if a disabled person was lying on it and as a means of relocating that person. Thus, the now-healed man was violating an oral law or tradition but not one of the Ten Commandments.

The man . . . told me (v. 11). This man's response echoes Adam's and Eve's efforts at redirecting blame away from themselves (Gen. 3:9-13). The healed man did not call Jesus by name because at that time he

did not know who it was who had healed him, he simply called his benefactor *the man*. Only later did he learn Jesus's identity (John 5:13-15).

John 5:17-20

Connection to the Point. Jesus has the authority to do what only God can do.

My Father is still working (v. 17). Despite the traditions of the elders, God did not cease His work on the Sabbath. The Jews believed that although God rested on the seventh day upon the completion of creation, He allowed Himself to work in some limited way on later Sabbaths. Evidence included people being born and dying on the Sabbath and the fact that creation was consistently being sustained year-round, including on the Sabbath—God did not take days off from that work.

And I am working also (v. 17). Just as the Father continued His work on the Sabbath, if even in a limited capacity, so the Son's compassion would not be rendered inoperable by the day of the week. With this statement Jesus put Himself on the same level as the Father; and in healing the man on the Sabbath, He was doing work only God was "permitted" to do.

Trying all the more to kill him (v. 18). This is the first reference in John's Gospel to the Jewish leaders wanting to kill Jesus. This wording, though, indicates this was a growing plan of action. In their minds, they would have been justified in doing so; they would have seen themselves as obeying Old Testament law in two respects. First, in healing the man when He did, Jesus was perceived to have dishonored the Sabbath. The Torah declared that violators were to be executed and contained an example of that happening (Ex. 35:2; Num. 15:32-36). Second, in their minds, in calling God "My Father" (John 5:17), Jesus had dishonored or blasphemed God's name. Rarely did Old Testament people refer to God as "Father." For Jesus to use the title so familiarly, so personally, without some qualifier (such as "in heaven" or "my eternal Father) seemed disrespectful and blasphemous to the ears of the religious elite. The Law instructed the Hebrews to stone to death anyone who uttered blasphemies against the Lord (Lev. 24:16). Blasphemy was the ultimate charge the Jews leveled against Jesus before Pilate (Matt. 26:63-65; John 19:7).

Making himself equal to God (v. 18). Jesus's two actions, which He knew were not offensive to God and did not intend to be offensive to people, meant He was elevating Himself to divine status. What the religious leaders did not grasp was that *they* were the ones who misunderstood Jesus's divine status. He was fully aware of who He was—the Word who became flesh. They, though, couldn't see it.

Truly (v. 19). The transliteration of the Greek word is *amen*. For emphasis, it occurs twice in the Greek text. Hence, some versions have "Verily, verily" or "Truly, truly" or something similar. John alone used this double "amen," and with it, he alerted the reader that Jesus was about to say something especially significant.

The Son is not able . . . on his own (v. 19). Being unable to do anything under one's own power is a recurring theme in John's Gospel (see 3:27; 6:32-33; 15:4-5). Jesus did not mean He was incapable as in

being powerless to act; He was saying He could not do anything under His own initiative. To do so would have been contrary to His divine yet submissive nature.

The Son likewise does these things (v. 19). If as Jesus claimed He was able to do whatever He saw His Father doing, that would mean Jesus was indeed divine. For Jesus, this was a clear declaration of His divinity. The apostle Paul echoed this understanding: “For the entire fullness of God’s nature dwells bodily in Christ” (Col. 2:9).

The Father loves (v. 20). These verbs are in a tense that indicates ongoing and continual action. This emphasizes both the then-current and the forward-continuing intimate relationship Jesus had with His Father. God would be showing Jesus things no one else had ever seen.

Greater works . . . so that you will be amazed (v. 20). The “you” is plural. Jesus knew these Jewish leaders would be astonished by what they saw. He did not say, though, that they would believe or be pleased—only that they would *be amazed*. In the next verse, Jesus spoke of the dead being raised to life. The Jews would see that with Lazarus (John 11). Rather than faith, though, they responded with anger, as we will soon see.