

Christ at the Pool of Bethesda

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 5:1-16

Preached on: Sunday, March 23, 2014

This morning we return again to our study of John's gospel and I would invite you to take your Bibles and turn to John 5 where this morning we will look at Christ at the pool of Bethesda. Let me read the text we will be looking at beginning in John 5 and verse 1,

“1 After these things 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 porticoes. 3 In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, waiting for the moving of the waters; 4 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. 5 A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. 6 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?' 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, 'Arise, pick up your pallet and walk.' 9 Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day. 10 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.' 11 But he answered them, 'He who made me well was the one who said to me, "Pick up your pallet and walk."'" 12 They asked him, 'Who is the man who said to you, "Pick up your pallet and walk"?' 13 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. 14 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.' 15 The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. 16 For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath.”

Once again, we come to a passage of Scripture that announces the kingdom which is continued to be supported by Jesus' miraculous works. Repeatedly in the gospels, you will read how Jesus tells the people that the kingdom of God is near to you. In fact, Luke 11:17-21, Jesus told the Pharisees, “Behold, the kingdom is in your midst.” And in the person of Christ, the divinely appointed king, was visibly present.

The first word about Christ recorded in the first of the four gospels carefully delineates his descent from the royal line of Israel. In Matthew 1:1 we read, “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” So, here again, we see how the long awaited kingdom of Old Testament prophecy had come near, so near that the people could actually see the face of the King and witness his miraculous works which were the predicted harbingers of the kingdom that we read about in the Old Testament. But I want to give you a caution here this morning before we look at the text more closely: many of our brothers, sisters in Christ have adopted a system of Bible interpretation that imposes the New Testament revelation of Christ on the Old Testament and they do this in such a way as to re-interpret the Old Covenant through the lens of the New Covenant, therefore, they believe in non-literal fulfillments of Old Testament

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prophecy regarding Israel. For them, the New Testament church has permanently replaced or what is sometimes called superseded Israel. Therefore, supersessionists or amillennialists as they are sometimes called, believe that ethnic national territorial Israel is all absorbed in the universal church thus eliminating their national identity forever. So, they would look at the Old Testament and view it primarily as a testament of types and shadows and pictures that prefigure greater New Testament realities.

So, they employ an allegorical spiritualizing method of interpretation which we would call hermeneutics rather than using a literal grammatic historical hermeneutic like they would use for the rest of the Bible. They spiritualize the Old Testament prophecies pertaining to Israel and they will argue that Old Testament prophecies must be interpreted in the light of the New Testament to find their deeper meaning. For them, the physical promises to Israel are re-interpreted to find their spiritual fulfillment in the church. This is very common.

Now, my purpose this morning is not to refute the hermeneutics of supersessionism so don't be too alarmed but I do want to warn you about the prominence of this kind of teaching in evangelicalism because perhaps it has even impacted how you view many things pertaining to Scripture. One of the many results of this system would include that the kingdom John the Baptist and Jesus announced was a spiritual kingdom, not a literal, physical kingdom. That it was the rule of God in the heart and, therefore, we are living in the Old Testament kingdom right now, not literally but spiritually. Therefore, when it comes to Jesus' miracles in the physical realm they would argue that this is primarily a demonstration of his love, his compassionate desire to alleviate the suffering of the people on earth.

Now, if his miracles properly belong to a spiritual kingdom that he allegedly established at his first coming, then I would humbly ask the question: why are they no longer present today? Certainly, the need to alleviate human need and suffering are every bit as pronounced today as they were 2,000 years ago. But this is easily answered when you understand that the kingdom that John the Baptist and Christ announced was not primarily a spiritual kingdom, it was a literal, physical kingdom. A consistent method of biblical interpretation makes it very clear, therefore, that Jesus' great miracles were the divine authentication of his regal Messiahship and the kingdom he offered was the one of Old Testament prophecy, a literal, earthly, physical kingdom. Jesus was not offering something new and foreign to the prophetic expectations of the Old Testament. This would have been terribly confusing to the Jews. In fact, as you look through the New Testament, you see that he repeatedly unfolded and re-interpreted, or I should say interpreted the words of the prophets.

You will recall, for example, that John the Baptist called all men to repentance and he said in Matthew 3:2, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." If by this, John and Jesus who said the same thing later, if they were announcing the rule of God in the hearts of men, that this is somehow an exclusively spiritual kingdom, the Jews would have laughed at this because they already understood that God was to reign in their hearts and they felt that he reigned in their hearts supremely because they kept the law. So, they already knew that. You will recall that in Matthew 11:2-5, the imprisoned John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus a very important question. Here's what he wanted them to ask him: "Are you the expected one or shall we look for someone else?" And Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see. The blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear and the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

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My friends, here Jesus directed John to view his miracles through the lens of Old Testament prophecy. He takes them back to the text that we read a few minutes ago in Isaiah 35, beginning in verse 5, where the prophet speaking of the earthly kingdom said, “Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy.” You see, this settled it for John and rightly so. He had not been mistaken. He understood that Jesus was, in fact, the promised mediatorial King of Old Testament prophecy that had come to establish the kingdom on earth. A literal kingdom that would manifest in numerous physical aspects of Old Testament prophecy. For this reason, Jesus told the Pharisees in Matthew 12:28, “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” But, as you know, Israel would reject their King, the kingdom on earth would be postponed and instead Israel needed a Savior to make them acceptable subjects of their King. He must first take his place upon an altar before he could reign upon a throne so in the gospels, the Jewish Messiah King is also presented as the Lamb of God.

Now, the point that I’m making is ultimately this: John's portrayal of Jesus as the Son of God here in this gospel must be understood in light of the kingdom. To say it differently, it cannot be understood apart from the proclamation of the king and his kingdom being offered to Israel and as we look at the gospels, Israel alone at first because to Israel alone belonged the covenantal rights of the Davidic kingdom. That's why John the Baptist came preaching from the wilderness saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” So, this speaks of the Old Testament earthly kingdom as a part of the Abrahamic and Davidic and New Covenant promises, the actual establishment of God's government upon the earth. Jesus came as the King of the Jews.

Jesus came to offer himself to Israel as the Christ, the Messiah of Old Testament prophecy but the initial offering of the kingdom was conditioned upon Israel's repentance and faith in their Savior King. We see this all through the gospels with the imperatives that Jesus and the disciples gave to the chosen nation. They had to make a decision: they had to repent, believe, receive, confess and follow Christ. If they accepted this then the kingdom would be established on earth with all of the national blessings. If they rejected it, there would be judgment, there would be the postponement of the kingdom and national punishment and unfortunately, they rejected Christ. John 1 tells us in verse 11 that “he came to his own and those who were his own did not receive him.”

As we look at the gospels, we see that they rejected the spiritual requirements that Jesus laid down as being essential to enter into the kingdom. They rejected him because he refused to establish a kingdom that was merely social and political in character. They hated him because he denounced their current religious system. He castigated their religious leaders. He exposed the hypocrisy of their traditions and their legalism, their ritualism. They hated him because he showed compassion toward the outcasts of Israel. And worst of all, he claimed to be God.

Of course, Jesus knew this would be their response all along and, therefore, this led to his announcement of the building of a new thing: his church that he would build and bless. A body of believers of both Jews and Gentiles that would be invested with special authority in the future kingdom of heaven. But the Messiah King, the Lord Jesus Christ made it clear that the establishment of the long awaited, long promised earthly kingdom would then be postponed and ultimately connected with his Second Coming when he would come not as the Lamb of God but as the Lion of Judah, the King of kings and Lord of lords. So folks, please don't get this confused: Israel's rejection of her Messiah did not nullify the unilateral, unconditional, irreversible

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covenants that God made to Abraham and to David concerning the establishment of the earthly kingdom. Their rejection only postponed it.

So, the custodianship of divine truth would be taken from the Jews who rejected it, it would be transferred to the Gentile church temporarily. Matthew 21:43, we read, "Therefore I say to you, The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it." So, indeed, the gospel was taken to the Gentiles and we as Gentiles have been grafted into the root of Abrahamic blessing but we do not become Israel. There is nowhere in Scripture that we read that somehow the church is spiritual Israel nor do we ever read any place that Israel has been forever rejected by God. This is going to be very important as we continue to study John's gospel and see the miracles that Jesus is doing.

So, the Jews were ultimately set aside, a new guardianship was established in the Gentile church but this transfer will not be permanent. For example, Jesus said in Luke 21:24, "Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles is fulfilled." Romans 11:25, Paul tells us that "a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in and thus all Israel will be saved." My friends, you are hard-pressed exegetically to say that all the church will be saved. Churches already say this is speaking of Israel, not the church. And he says, "just as it is written, the Deliverer will come from Zion. He will remove ungodliness from Jacob." Then, "This is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." So, in the gospels, the proclamation of the kingdom is inseparably connected with its King, the Lord Jesus Christ and his miracles were performed primarily to authenticate his regal claim as the Messiah of Israel, that they might know that the kingdom, indeed, was at hand.

Now, with that background, we come to our text this morning where again we see the ministry of Christ and his message of the kingdom. It's being met with opposition right from the very beginning. He was not politically correct, religious correct. He was not seeker sensitive. He begins by driving the moneychangers and all of the heretics out of the temple precincts and now he is going to publicly breach their legalistic traditions by healing an impotent man on the Sabbath. Can you believe this? So, my outline to you as we look at this text is fourfold: we're going to see a place of divine mercy, a picture of human depravity, a parable of sovereign grace and a portrayal of religious hypocrisy.

Notice first this place of divine mercy beginning in John 5:1-2, "After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes." Which, by the way, a portico is a porch. As I look at this, there seems to be some profound symbolism in this location. It's interesting that in Nehemiah 3, there is the record of the walls that were rebuilt when the exiles, the remnant of Israel, came back from Babylon. And in that chapter in Nehemiah 3 we read of ten gates and the sheep gate was the first to be rebuilt and for good reason for it was through the sheep gate that the sacrificial animals were brought to the temple, the innocent, unblemished lamb being the dominant sacrifice. And as we look at Nehemiah 3:1, it's no surprise that we should read, "Then Eliashib the high priest arose with his brothers the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors."

You see, the covenant people understood their need for mercy required the shedding of blood on the mercy seat, the place of propitiation where on the Day of Atonement, the blood was sprinkled, the blood of an unblemished lamb in the place of propitiation, the mercy seat. And all of this

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symbolized the condescending love of God that was lavished upon the people with no consideration of the fact that none of them merited his grace and now we have the great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ who himself is the unblemished, innocent Lamb of God, presenting himself in this place of divine mercy. In fact, the word “Bethesda” is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word “betesda” which means “house of outpouring” or “house of mercy.” Those who trust in Jesus as their only hope of salvation not only receive mercy but they continue to experience the mercy of God and for this reason we are told in Hebrews 4:16 to “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace that we might receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.”

So, this first of all, is a place of divine mercy but secondly we see a picture of human depravity. Notice verse 3, “In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered.” In other words, in these porches, these porticoes. Now, what a tragic scene this is: the great physician who is neither wanted nor recognized is walking amongst a large number of sick, suffering, impotent and, frankly, ignorant people. What a picture of human depravity, not to mention, the spiritual state of Judaism in that day. Notice the description: they were first of all sick. The term signifies varying forms of weakness or impotence. They were helpless, they were hurting, they were powerless to do anything to alleviate their miserable condition. Even so, all men apart from Christ are in the same state. Indeed, Israel was spiritually sick; they were utterly impotent. They were unable in themselves to be reconciled to God and experience his blessing because of their inability to keep the law in which they foolishly made their boast.

We also read: the people were blind. How sad to live in utter darkness physically. But what's worse is all men are born spiritually blind. They can't even see their own impotence, even their own blindness. The word of God says that “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit for they are foolishness to him. Nor can he know them because he is spiritually appraised.” He is unable to recognize the facts. Jesus said in John 3:19, “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world and men love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed.” But, my friends, man is doubly blind. Not only because of his nature but because of Satan. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, we read how unbelievers are described as those whose “minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God, should shine on them.” This was especially true of Israel due to their unbelief. In fact, the converted Rabbi, the Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 11:8 that “God has given them,” referring to Israel, “a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear to this very day.”

The Spirit of God speaks as well through his inspired writer saying that the people were lame. The term speaks of any person with an impaired ability to walk and as we see the word “walk,” for example, used figuratively in Scripture it pictures the spiritual and moral direction of a person's life. We are told in Deuteronomy 8:6 that believers are to “observe the commands of their Lord, their God, walking in his ways and revering him,” but because of sin, man cannot do that apart from regenerating grace. Paul tells us in Colossians 3:5-7 that before we were born again, before we were saved, we once walked in immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed which amounts to idolatry.” He went on to say, “For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come.” How sad. Even if the unregenerate could see, they cannot walk. They cannot see the narrow gate; they can't see it, they can't find it. And even if they could, they are unable to walk through it and traverse the narrow way. They cannot walk in the light. They

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cannot walk in obedience and truth. They are unable to do so. Such was the state of Judaism. They could not and would not follow their Messiah. They were helpless in their spiritual condition. Indeed, Jesus made it clear that no man will ever, ever, ever come to him unless “the Father who sent me,” Jesus says, “draws him.”

They were also withered. The term means they were paralyzed. My friends, can it get any worse than this? Imagine if all of this is put together, you have a scene that is simply horrific. Beloved, this is the effect of sin upon our world and this characterizes man's depraved condition. Spiritually, people are impotent; they are unable to help themselves. They are blind in their understanding and in their mind, they grope in the darkness of sin and in Satan's spiritual kingdom of darkness. They are so crippled in their spiritual state that they can't follow Christ even if they wanted to which they don't. In fact, they are utterly paralyzed.

I want you to notice, dear friends, how the Spirit of God in this little scene leaves absolutely no room for man's contribution to mercy and grace. Beloved, let this solemn scene be a portrait of your nature and mine before Christ, a picture of who we were before we were born again and if you're here today without Christ, a picture of who you are today.

Now, notice next a natural consequence of their physical condition which also pictures their spiritual state. At the end of verse 3 you have in parenthesis here, they were “[waiting for the moving of the waters; 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.” Now, the reason it's in this parenthesis is because the earliest Greek manuscripts omit this entire section. Others include it but acknowledge that it should be considered as spurious. It was probably added later after John's account to somehow address the popular superstition of the day.

Then in verse 5, we get to the core of the story. “A certain man was there who had been thirty-eight years in his sickness.” Now, obviously this man believed something supernatural was associated with this body of water and such is the power of superstition, especially when people cannot see the saving, transforming power of Christ in the gospel. The re-occurring figure of water in John's gospel is fascinating to me. I don't want to make much of it but perhaps John is showing yet another kind of symbolism related to Jesus' first miracle at Cana where the Messianic bridegroom, you will recall, had to transform the ritual cleansing water of burdensome orthodox Judaism into the new wine of the kingdom that symbolized his redeeming and cleansing blood. John may also be following up on the symbolism of Jacob's well where he was at previously with the woman of Sychar. There you will remember that there was a finite body of water that existed outside of the body that must enter into the body. But Jesus, instead, offered living water that springs from within and forever brings refreshment and satisfaction to the soul. In both scenarios, we see that new revelation is required. It's necessary in order for people to believe and experience newness of life.

Now, likewise with these dear people at Bethesda, they are foolishly believing the promises of superstitious religion and they need the transforming truth of Christ who alone is the way, the truth and the life. Deliverance and healing is not found in the water but it's found in Christ and how sad to see people waiting in vain for things which can never save. Again, what a picture of human depravity. Man is spiritually helpless. He gropes in the darkness of sin and Satan. He's unable to walk through the narrow gate of Christ. He is absolutely paralyzed like a living corpse.

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Oh dear friend, once again, I pray that God has given you the eyes to see the wretchedness of life apart from Christ.

Verse 6, “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?’” Do you want to get well? Here, beloved, we see a parable of sovereign grace. Out of this multitude of wretchedness, isn't it interesting that Jesus singles this man out and asks him, “Do you want to get well?” Well, the obvious answer is, “Yes.” And Jesus, of course, knew that but Jesus is trying to get the man to focus exclusively on him rather than the superstitious water and the assistance of men and his own abilities or inabilities to get into the water. He wants him to look into the eyes of the lover of his soul and the only true object of saving faith. “Are you willing to put yourself in my hands?” is basically what I believe the Lord is asking here. “You think you must do something and something else is going to save you but I’m asking you, 'Will you trust me?’”

Here we see another picture of Israel's misplaced faith, even as this man and all the rest trusted in the water that may occasionally bubble up which was probably the result of an underground spring. We know there is an underground spring in that area. I was recently in Israel and I saw where that pool is. It's in kind of a rough part of town now but there is a spring down there. It wasn't being moved by angels or anything like that. But in similar manner, the object of Israel's faith was not in their Messiah who was right there in their midst, it was in their own ability to keep the law. But the Jews were not alone in their foolishness. Think of all of the souls that believe in some false religion and they're lying there, so to speak, dying in their sins, waiting upon the powerless quackery of some false teacher, waiting upon the futile speculations and superstitions of their own imagination. They will not look to Christ. There's is a false hope in human achievement and religious scams.

So, filled with frustration, self-absorbed and numb, in verse 7 we read, “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.’” It's interesting: not knowing who Jesus was all he could think about was the object of his misguided faith and some person to help him. He had no idea that mercy was so near. But the Messianic King was right there looking at him. Again, as I think about this, what a parable of sovereign grace in God's elected purposes. This man was not seeking Christ, Christ was seeking him. It was his divine prerogative to choose whom he pleased out of all of those suffering people and he chose this man to be the undeserved recipient of his elective love for no other reason than his sovereign good pleasure. A choice that, according to Scripture, was made before the foundations of the earth. This man's name had been written in the Lamb's book of life and he didn't know it.

As you look at this, there was nothing about this man that made him any more worthy of grace than any of the others. Jesus did not choose him because of some forcing faith. This man had no faith. He didn't know who Jesus was. Moreover, this man did not take the initiative, Jesus did and, again, Jesus acted according to his eternal purposes. Had he not done so, this man would have never sought the Savior and so it is, my friends, with saving grace. It is all of grace. Salvation is all of grace from beginning to end and it is accomplished only by the power of God. This is so vividly depicted here at the pool of Bethesda. The word of God makes it clear that by reason of depravity, all that man is and all that he does is fundamentally offensive to God. By reason of condemnation, man enters life already under the sentence of divine wrath because of sin committed in Adam. And because of alienation, man is set in rebellion against God. He is at

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enmity at God at birth. By reason of his corrupted will, apart from God's convicting power, the will of man is fully set in him to do evil all his days unless God does something. For these reasons, the word of God tells us that salvation originates in the plan of God. And salvation is made possible only by the grace of God. And salvation is brought to completion only by the power of God. And the supreme and ruling motivation of God in the salvation of any man is his own glory.

So, we come to verses 8-9. "Jesus said to him, 'Arise, take up your pallet and walk.' Immediately the man became well, and took up his pallet and began to walk." I love this. What an amazing scene. Even as the Son of God spoke the universe into existence, here he speaks and life is imparted to this man. Unlike all of the phony miracles of modern day faith healers, this man's cure is instantaneous, it is perfectly complete and here this man, I believe, is given faith to obey these three commands that Jesus gives him: arise, take up your pallet and walk.

But notice the reaction of the Jewish leaders in verse 10, "Therefore, the Jews were saying to him, Oh, praise God. Look what God has done!" Not at all. They were saying to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet." You know folks, whenever a man exercises faith in Christ and obeys him, he can expect criticism, especially from the religious world who most fiercely opposes Christ. You want to see where Satan works the hardest? Go to the religious world. And here, fourthly and finally, we see a portrayal of religious hypocrisy. Now, I would submit to you that this is the primary emphasis of this entire narrative where Jesus is contrasting grace against law and hypocrisy which is going to continue to fuel the fires of Jewish antipathy towards their Messiah.

Now, Jesus could have chosen any day to heal this man but he deliberately specifically chose the Sabbath because the Sabbath day most dramatically exposed the rabbinic traditions that radically differed not only from God's design for the Sabbath but radically differed from the gospel of grace. Now, to be sure, the Old Testament did prohibit working on the Sabbath, a cessation from a person's normal occupation. It was considered a day of rest but the Scribes, the Rabbis, had come up with 39 tasks that they included that should be prohibited on that day and one of those was to prohibit carrying a load and, of course, this man was carrying probably his straw pallet. So, rather than rejoicing with this man, they attack him for not conforming to their ridiculous rules.

Folks, why do people do this? And sometimes we may be guilty of it, too. Coming up with legalistic stuff that's not found anywhere in Scripture. Why would they do this? If I can put the answer forthrightly and as simply as I know how: it's because legalism provides the illusion of spirituality and it fuels the hideous sin of self-righteous pride that we're all prone to. The problem is: there are not enough legalistic rules in all of the world to appease an accusing conscience so what you find in legalistic circles is there's always a new set of rules coming out. There is always another one. The alternative is to embrace grace. But people don't want grace, they want rules because then I can keep those rules and make myself feel good about myself and make myself feel better than those of you that don't do what you're supposed to be doing. That's what's going on here.

Again, aren't you glad that God is pleased with you because you're hidden in Christ? We don't have to keep all these rules. And folks, this is the message of the gospel that Jesus is preaching.

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So, in verse 10 again, “Therefore the Jews were saying to him who was cured, 'It is the Sabbath and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet.’” Verse 11, “But he answered them, 'He who made me well was the one who said to me, “Pick up your pallet and walk.” They asked him, 'Who is the man who said to you, “Pick up your pallet and walk”?’ 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.” My friends, they knew perfectly well who it was. Mark tells us that the news of Jesus' miracles, it was spreading like wild fire but they wanted a verbal testimony. They didn't have mics in those days but if they had, they would have held the mic up to his mouth, “Tell us, who was it that told you to take up your pallet and walk?” You see, they wanted to take legal action against him. In fact, even the way they phrased their question insinuates that this healer can't be from God because he has violated the Sabbath. So, from the very beginning, Satan uses these false teachers to undermine Christ's credibility in the mind of this poor man and this is the same thing that we see today. Satan is absolutely ingenious in somehow maliciously undermining the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I believe Jesus didn't want to interact with this awe-struck crowd at this point. He had something more important in mind. His focus was the inevitable showdown with the religious leaders. But notice what happens in verse 14, “Afterward Jesus found him in the temple.” Now, we don't know if that was ten minutes later, hours later or the next day. It just says afterward. “And said to him, 'Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse may befall you.’” Now, why this man went to the temple we don't know. We can assume that he was going there to give thanks to God. That's what I think he was probably doing but with respect to Jesus' warning concerning sin, there are various positions on this but I do not believe that Jesus is alluding to some past sin committed 38 years ago that resulted in his physical deformity and paralysis. He may have been, but I don't think so. One of the reasons I would say that is that the present tense form of the verb must be translated “no longer continue in sin” denoting the ongoing state of the man's condition. And it seems to me that Jesus is in essence saying to him – and by the way, we don't have the full narrative. I'm sure there was much more that went on. This is part of what was said but I would imagine that Jesus is saying to him something like this, “If you continue in sin, if you continue to be a slave to your sins, something far worse than your physical illness will be in store, namely, eternal damnation. You must repent. You must be born again. You must be delivered from the power and penalty of sin. You must trust in me.”

While the man was healed physically, I believe it is safe to assume that Jesus continues to pursue him and to bring healing to his soul. And again, the entirety of the conversation is not recorded but I can't believe that such an encounter with the living Christ would have resulted in anything other than genuine saving faith.

So, emboldened I believe by his new-found faith and perhaps even at the request of his new Master, verse 15, “The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.” Literally, “It is Jesus who did make me well.” So, there is no reason from the text to believe that somehow he was trying to curry favor with the authorities as some have indicated, especially after experiencing the person and the power of Christ. I believe this to be nothing more than an honest confession from the lips of this man of who Jesus really was.

Then in verse 16, “For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath.” My friends, this will be the point of contention for the next four chapters

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Christ at the Pool of Bethesda

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 5:1-16

Preached on: Sunday, March 23, 2014

and it's going to lead to more and more persecution that will finally nail the Lord Jesus Christ to a cross where the King of the Jews will be crowned with a crown of thorns.

My friends, I leave you with this: won't you celebrate grace today? As we read this amazing passage, won't you take this passage and contrast those people in all of their misery with your impotent, sick, blind condition before you came to Christ? To think that because of Christ, he came, he found us and he healed us spiritually. Our sins have been forgiven. We don't have to keep onerous rules and best of all, beloved, the King is coming. Amen? The King is coming. I'm reminded of what Paul said in Colossians 3, he says, "Set your mind on the things above not on the things of this earth for you have died and your life is hidden in Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you will be revealed with him in glory." Alright? So, the King is coming and we see a preview of coming attractions in this amazing story at the pool of Bethesda.

Let's pray together.

Father, we are overwhelmed by your glory and grace. May we celebrate it every day of our lives. And Lord, for those that do not know you as Savior, O Father, draw them unto yourself this day that they might repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. We thank you and we praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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