

Easter 2011

“God Helps Those...”

John 5:1 After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

John 5:2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches.

John 5:3 In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water.

John 5:4 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.

John 5:5 Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years.

John 5:6 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?"

John 5:7 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."

John 5:8 Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk."

John 5:9 And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.

John 5:10 The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed."

John 5:11 He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.' "

John 5:12 Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?"

John 5:13 But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place.

John 5:14 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."

John 5:15 The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

Finish this sentence: “God helps those....”

"God helps those who help themselves" is probably the most often quoted phrase that is *not* found in the Bible. It is actually a quote from Ben Franklin and it appeared in *Poor Richard's Almanac* in 1757.

The account of Jesus healing the lame man by the Pool of Bethesda establishes that God helps those **who cannot help themselves**.

You and I need help:

- Maybe your marriage isn't exactly going well. In fact, it might be on its last leg.
- Maybe your marriage is strong and that's a really good thing because you're having so much trouble with your kids that it would destroy a weaker marriage.
- Almost everybody needs help at work or in school.
- The help you need could be physical. You're waiting on a test result, or you've just gotten one and are facing a battle against some disease.

Beyond those types of things, and more important than all of them, everyone needs *spiritual* help. You see, the Bible says in no uncertain terms that we are sinners, separated from God and in need of salvation.

Maybe you can resolve your marriage problems... or get control of your kids... or get another job... or get through school... or beat-back the disease (at least for a while). In other words, you don't think you are really 'paralyzed.' You don't see yourself as helpless as the people around the pool.

But when it comes to your spiritual condition, **you are paralyzed**. You read in the Bible,

Romans 5:6 (NASB) For while we were still **helpless**, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

If there was something, *anything*, you could do to help yourself spiritually, then Jesus would not have come from Heaven to the earth as a man to die on the Cross and then rise the third day.

Let's say you still don't think you need help - not from God, anyway, not enough to acknowledge you are a sinner in need of saving. Who would that make you in this story? Well, you'd be one of the "Jews" who stood around doing nothing to help the paralyzed man to get in to the waters.

I'd rather admit my need for God's help and identify myself with the paralyzed man who was not only miraculously healed but who could walk with God and be empowered to "sin no more."

John 5:1 After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Most scholars say this was the Feast of Pentecost. Every male Jew was required to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the major feasts. It makes this story even more tragic. With the population swelled, why were there none to carry this man to the water?

One reason was that the Jews believed someone in his condition deserved to be in his condition. They saw it as God's judgment upon the person and went about feeling superior to those who were afflicted.

There's another expression we are familiar with. It goes like this: "You made your bed, now lie in it." I'm pretty sure it was unknown to the first century but it fits the situation. Folks passing this man, and the others like him, would think, "Hey, whatever his condition, he deserves to be lying there paralyzed. He brought it upon Himself." He made his bed, as it were.

Here they were, the multitudes, supposedly 'worshipping' God. Yet God had so much compassion on helpless sinners He became a man in order to die in their place.

John 5:2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches.

The "Sheep Gate" is the gate by which sacrifices were brought into Jerusalem. "Bethesda" means *house of mercy*. There were five covered porches around this pool of water. The number five is significant in that there were five books of Moses, called the Pentateuch, and considered the Law of God.

John 5:3 In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water.

The *physical* condition of these few hundred or so people represents the *spiritual* condition of the whole nation. The nation of Israel was gathered around the Law, the way these people were gathered around the five pillars, but they were spiritually blind, lame, and paralyzed.

In other words, **it wasn't just those who were blind, lame and paralyzed who were blind, lame and paralyzed.**

This extends beyond the Jews to the entire human race. All have sinned and fallen short of God. There is no person on earth whose righteousness is acceptable to God.

One of the obstacles to being saved is that you don't see yourself as you really are. One of the amazing things about the Bible is that it can expose **you** to yourself. It can show you how you really look to God. It can show you your sin and need for a Savior.

John 5:4 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.

There are two views on this verse. One view says that this was a commentary about what people commonly believed, and the other takes the words at their face value.

One view says this was just a deep pool that occasionally bubbled and people hoped there was supernatural power in the water. The other says God in His mercy actually sent an angel to touch the water and allow it to heal.

It would seem this pool was probably what we would call a hot spring that held a certain medicinal value. Undoubtedly some people were helped, maybe even healed, of certain conditions - but not everyone. Thus the superstition arose that you could only be helped when the water was stirred and it must be that God had sent an angel to do it.

I wonder if kids, as a prank, ever tossed stones in the water? Imagine the scramble by these poor, sick folks.

John 5:5 Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years.

John 5:6 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?"

John 5:7 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."

Where were the religious leaders? Where were the crowds that had swelled the population of the city? They were going about performing the various rites and rituals of their religion when all the while they were ignoring showing compassion and mercy upon these who were in need of help and healing.

There's something precious about Jesus hanging out with these invalids. It illustrates His mission. They represent the true spiritual condition of the entire human race. He is God in our midst, come to help and to heal all those who will receive Him as their Savior.

Let's look at this question for a moment: "Do you want to be made well?" It seems absurd. *Of course he wants to be made well!* That is why he is at the pool, isn't it?

Over the years I've talked to my share of folks in desperate situations like we mentioned before. For example, their marriage is on its last leg, about to end. I've suggested they turn to Jesus, suggested a spiritual course of action. Often they shake their head, they refuse. They want to be made well but not at the expense of surrendering their lives to the Lord.

I've spoken to nonbelievers facing imminent death who nevertheless refuse to ask the Lord to save them.

This kind of refusal isn't limited to nonbelievers. Believers, too, who have walked with the Lord for many years, can refuse His help for one reason or another.

Let me ask you: "Do **you** want to be made well?" If you sincerely do, you can be. Jesus is saying these next words to you.

John 5:8 Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk."

Jesus commanded the man to do what was impossible. He was always doing that! He told a man with a withered hand to stretch it out. He spoke to the dead and they arose.

His command thus contained the enabling to keep it. All of the Lord's commands to you contain His enabling to keep them. You are enabled to do the impossible when you purpose in your heart to obey Jesus.

His words make the impossible possible to the believer.

John 5:9 And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.

Think about a person who hadn't walked for thirty-eight years. Think of the muscle atrophy and all the other physical deterioration. Shouldn't he start slowly, with physical therapy? No, not with Jesus! Just start walking again.

Sometimes people think their problems are too severe. There's too much damage to be undone. It's no different than the man who was lame almost four decades.

John 5:10 The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed."

John 5:11 He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'"

John 5:12 Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?"

John 5:13 But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place.

The "Jews" refers to the relatively small but powerful group of religious leaders. They knew this man; they had passed by him often enough. Rather than rejoice in God's mercy, they were upset about the strict rules required by their interpretation of the Sabbath regulations.

Thinking that you can help yourself spiritually and merit a relationship with God led to some extreme Sabbath regulations. Rule number thirty-nine forbade the carrying of a load from one dwelling to another. That would apply to carrying your bedroll, even if you were homeless. According to the

Jewish leaders, the man should either have stayed where he was until the Sabbath was over, or else he should have left his only possession - his bed - behind.

This devotion to the interpretation of the Sabbath law still goes on today. An April, 1992, tenants let three apartments in an Orthodox neighborhood in Israel burn to the ground while they asked a rabbi whether a telephone call to the fire department on the Sabbath would violate Jewish law. Observant Jews are forbidden to use the phone on the Sabbath because doing so would break an electrical current, which is considered a form of work. In the half-hour it took the rabbi to decide “yes,” the fire spread to two neighboring apartments.

John 5:14 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."

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All sickness and disease is the result of sin entering God's creation when Adam and Eve disobeyed in the Garden. Their sin brought with it decay, disease and death.

But not all sickness is the direct result of your sin, or of your being in sin.

Jesus didn't say the man was paralyzed *because* of his own personal sin. He may have brought this upon himself, but that's not the real point since all of us are like him.

What, then, did Jesus mean when He said, “lest a worse thing come upon you?”

Well, there **is** something worse than thirty-eight years of lameness. In another place Jesus said, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

Jesus had *physically* healed the lame man by the pool. It is here, in the Temple, He addressed his *spiritual* condition. Jesus was telling the man

that He could be saved so that he might walk with God the rest of his life. He could be saved lest the “worse thing,” eternal separation from God, come upon him after death.

When the man was first asked who physically healed him he did not know. But after this second encounter with Jesus he goes about telling folks it was “Jesus.” *He came to know Jesus!* His soul was healed or, we would say, he was saved.

The most powerful statement in this text are the three words, “sin no more.” Here are three things Jesus meant, and stills means, by those words.

⇒ First, by saying “sin no more” Jesus was declaring He had the power to forgive sins. This is good news for the human race because we’re told “all have sinned and fall short” of being perfect. There is no one who can stand before God on their own. Jesus came and took the sins of the whole human race upon Himself. He died to satisfy the penalty for sin. Now whosoever believes in Him has their sins forgiven.

⇒ Second, by saying “sin no more” Jesus was promising that He could and would give the man power to live the Christian life. Living for God is not a matter of keeping a set of burdensome Laws, like those surrounding the Sabbath. It is a matter of having His Spirit indwell you to empower you. Walking with God is a blessing, not a burden.

⇒ A third thing about the phrase, “sin no more.” The word for “sin” means *missing the mark*. It’s the word you’d use of an archer who took aim but missed the bull’s eye by some margin, either greater or lesser.

Are you ‘missing the mark’ in some area of your life? Are you not quite able to hit the bull’s eye? Or even the target? Jesus, and by that I mean a relationship with Him, is the only thing that will bring you to the bull’s eye in every area of your life.

You and I need help. God helps those who cannot help themselves, but He will not force Himself upon you. He still asks, “Do you **want** to be made

well?” For those who say “Yes,” He still says, “Sin no more,” providing the power to accomplish what He has commanded.

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Most of you are believers in Jesus Christ. How is your walk? Your Lord is here today asking you, “Do you want to be made well?”

Do you want to return to your first love? Do you need to repent of some ongoing sin? Do it so you can experience the power of Jesus saying, “Sin no more?”

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Several of you here today are not yet believers in Jesus Christ. You might be here because you know you need help. God will help you by healing you spiritually!

Some of you might have a few problems, but nothing you'd ask help for. Remember, though, that there is a problem you cannot do anything about. You were born a sinner and you've committed individual acts of sin. You therefore need the forgiveness of your sins - and that can only come from Jesus at the foot of His Cross where He took your place, where He bled and died instead of you.

Would you be made well today? **You can be, if you will receive Jesus Christ!**