

*He Loved Me . . .*

*He Loves Me Lots*

*The Gospel of John*

Text

John 5:1-16

Topic

Out of multitudes of sick people at the Pool of Bethesda seeking healing, Jesus singles out one man who has been infirm for 38 years

Title

***“.38 Special”***

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**How many times have you heard, “There are no stupid questions?”**

*There are.* Lawyers ask witnesses stupid questions. Here are five that are on the record:

1. “Doctor, how many of your autopsies have you performed on dead people?”
2. “Any suggestions as to what prevented this from being a murder trial instead of an attempted murder trial?”
3. “Were you alone or by yourself?”
4. “How far apart were the vehicles at the time of the collision?”
5. “Now doctor, isn’t it true that when a person dies in his sleep, he doesn’t know about it until the next morning?”

Asking an infirm man who was waiting by a healing pool, "Do you want to be made well?," sounds like a stupid question. It can't be, however, *because it was asked by Jesus.*

Jesus told him to do something that was impossible - "Rise, take up your bed and walk."

**Jesus is always telling us to do things that are impossible.**

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 You Are Commanded To Do The Impossible Made Possible**, and **#2 You Are Capable Of Doing The Impossible Made Possible.**

### **#1 - You Are Commanded To Do The Impossible Made Possible (v1-8)**

1. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:25).
2. "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22).
3. "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord" (Colossians 3:20).

**Three things that are impossible on our own, and we haven't even left the house.**

C.S. Lewis, answering whether the Christian life was hard or easy, writes, *"It's hard as death in the beginning, and then as Jesus' life begins to work within us and transform us, it is relatively easy, because He does the work of transforming us. He lives within us and helps us to do impossible things."*

Another quote I came across: *"The Christian life is not hard. It is impossible. We can no more live the impossible Christian life on our own than we can get to Heaven on our own."*

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

John doesn't mention which "feast." It is one of many unanswered questions scholars have in this encounter. Don't get sidetracked trying to figure out things that can't be figured out. Concentrate on what is revealed.

Joh 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 was the entrance for sheep entering into the Temple compound from the sheep markets.

The pool had several names, but we'll stick with "Bethesda." One source writes, *"Archaeologists located the pool, excavated it, and found that it was more than 300 feet long - almost the length of two Olympic-size swimming pools. A series of columns ran along each side and along a partition in the middle, which explains the mention of five porticoes. Stairs were built in the corners of the pool."*

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

Beggars we encountered on short-term mission trips haunt my memory. I recall nearly stepping on a few, lying on their mats of cardboard, and almost tripping over a Filipino man 'walking' with his arms and hands, having no legs.

Joh 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.

I read an article this week titled, *Who Took Verse Four Out of My Bible?* There is scholarly disagreement about whether the end of verse three and all of verse four are the genuine, inspired word of God, or were added later for clarification.

It has to do with the manuscripts we have, and which are considered "best" and "earliest" by translators of various versions.

In verse seven the infirm man does mention the stirring of the water. That much is true with or without the omitted words. At issue is who stirred the water and if the healings were genuine. It might help to know more about the pool itself.

Based on historical and archaeological evidence, the pool was almost certainly a healing center called an Asclepion after the Greco-Roman god, Asclepius. Over 300 are known to have existed.

In mythology, Asclepius was the son of the god Apollo and a mortal woman named Coronis. Call him "Dr. Demigod." He was taught healing arts by Chiron, a centaur.

One Jewish source I consulted said, "The god's mythical daughters included the goddesses Hygeia and Panacea. We can hear in their Greek names our modern words for "hygiene" and "panacea," concepts associated today with medicine and health."

Asclepius was the son of the union of a god and a mortal woman. He could heal people, and raise the dead. He was a satanic counterfeit to Jesus. Second-century Christian apologist Justin Martyr writes, "When the Devil brings forward Asclepius as the raiser of the dead and healer of all diseases, may I not say that in this matter likewise, he has imitated the prophecies about Christ?"

Who stirred the water? We are not told, and don't know if it was a "Who?" or a "What?"

- We know from accounts that the waters of Bethesda "stirred" when a priest of Asclepius would open the underground pipes.
- Others propose it was a hot spring that bubbled every so often. (No evidence exists that the water was hot).

"Angel" is the translation of *messenger*. It need not refer to a heavenly angel, or to a supernatural creature. Maybe it was referring to a priest.

Did genuine healing occur? I can only say that the sick who went there believed the stories, and they were not dissuaded if no one was healed. Four million people visit Fatima annually because they believe the Virgin Mary appeared to three children in 1917. The Roman Catholic Church reports the occasional miracle at Fatima, as well as at the other eight sites where Mary is believed to have appeared. Only a few maybe-healings, yet people continue to flock to these sites.

We don't know, either, how often the water was stirred. If it was from the activity of the priests, it could have been often. But it might have been weeks or months or more between stirrings.

Medicine was ineffective at best. The chronically ill in Bible times were clinging to a thread of hope.

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

I have to think that in those nearly four decades of infirmity he had sought other healings. I've known sick people who become healing-chasers, going to meetings and crusades. They will try almost anything. We encountered more than one person who was traveling to the Philippines to receive 'psychic surgery.'

It can be hard (believe me, I know) to resign yourself to your infirmity without resigning yourself to despair. The chase for the cure can keep you occupied.

It's better to take the approach of the apostle Paul. He resigned himself to his "thorn in the flesh," and said he took "pleasure" in it and "boasted" of it.

**Adversity doesn't necessitate despair we can have the joy of the Lord in any affliction.**

Joh 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?"

"Lying there," paralyzed, he had no hope of getting to the water first. I can't even begin to speculate about his logic.

"Do you want to be made well?" The word for "well" is *hygiēs* (hoog-ee-ace'). Earlier I mentioned that one of the daughters of Asclepius was Hygiea, and that it is where we get our word hygiene. The use of this particular word gives additional credibility to the assertion that the pool was an Asclepion.

Seems obvious that an infirm man at a healing center wanted to be "made well." Think of it like this: When you share Jesus with someone, aren't you asking them, "Do you want to be made well?"

Sadly, they mostly say "No." They offer some lament, or excuse, or complaint, or argument. They do not want to receive the Lord and "be made well."

I've counseled couples over the years who don't really want their marriage to be made well. They offer lame excuses. They act as if the living water of God the Holy Spirit is unattainable for them. They accuse their spouse of crippling them.

Joh 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."

Public pools always have posted rules: No running, no diving, supervise your kids, toddlers must wear swim proof diapers. They may as well just have a sign that says, "If you haven't thrown-up from the smell of chlorine, there is way too much bacteria in the pool from toddlers wearing regular diapers or going commando."

I wonder how filthy the water was in the Pool of Bethesda? It wasn't filtered. You might get a worse sickness from the water.

Are tourists still kissing the Blarney Stone in the age of COVID? I feel obligated to share my research. More than one travel blog insists, "The Blarney Stone was once the deflector stone at the bottom of a toilet."

What a pitiable site it must have been to see multitudes of sick, lame, blind, and otherwise infirm beggars crawling or stumbling, tripping over and stomping upon one another, to reach the water.

Do you see the world of nonbelievers in those terms? Jesus does. He's still asking them, "Do you want to be made well?" He's doing it through you and I, and through the church, His Temples on Earth.

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

To quote the church father Vizzini, "*Inconceivable!*"

**J**esus commands the impossible. It may sound mystical, but once you realize the Christian life is impossible, **it is possible.**

## **#2 - You Are Capable Of Doing The Impossible Made Possible (v9-16)**

We are always talking about God's Word being His enabling. If He commands you to do something, you better believe it is something you can do. Not in your strength; never. It is all Him enabling you in your weakness. I can think of no better example of the Lord's command containing His enabling than this infirm man by the Pool of Bethesda.

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

These three things are not steps or a formula. They are more like principles that shed light on enabling.

"Rise." Everything in the Christian life depends upon the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

He rose from the dead and is the firstfruits of all those who will follow in His resurrection. Because He rose, and we are in Him, we are already spiritually

risen. Among lots of other things, it means we are enabled to “rise” above any circumstance. The resurrection eliminates lame excuses.

“Take up your bed.” The infirm man was done with the Pool of Bethesda. He had a new way of life.

When a person is saved, they enter a new life with its new way of living. It springs forth from within. It is a by-product of being saved. Your motivations are different. You have an appetite for spiritual things. Habits and addictions of your flesh are gone. You are a new creation.

“Walk.” Forget the man’s infirmity. What about atrophy? Nevertheless, he immediately was restored and could walk.

By far the most common phrase Christians use is some variant of “walk with the Lord.” When born again, your dead human spirit comes alive, and God the Holy Spirit comes within.

There is fellowship, communion, relationship. God is in you, with you, upon you. It’s like taking a pleasant walk with God.

The part we play is the decision to believe and obey. **Our believing is not work.** It is all of grace. In Romans 4:5 Paul said, “But to him who **does not work but believes** on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.”

**Believing is the only thing you can do that’s not counted as work.**

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

Consulting all four Gospels, Jesus performed healing on the Sabbath five times. He took the initiative all five times. It was deliberate.

Joh 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.”



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

Can we please agree to quit saying, "He threw me under the bus?"

Commentators say that the now-healed man threw Jesus under the cart. All he did, however, was answer their question.

There are few rules in Scripture for 'keeping' the Sabbath. We read, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work" (Exodus 20). Elsewhere Jews were told not to "kindle a fire"(Exodus 35:3), and to not carry a burden through the gates of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 17).

The Jewish teachers wanted to codify exactly what constituted "work." They proposed thirty-nine categories, and categories within categories. Their rules are ridiculously complex and convoluted.

### **Believers in the Church Age have no obligation to 'keep' the Sabbath.**

In the Book of Acts a church council was convened to discuss what was required of non-Jews (15).

No requirement, or even suggestion, to observe Sabbaths was said to be necessary for non-Jews. Jews either, for that matter.

All you need to know about how keeping the Sabbath can go horribly wrong is that these guys were more interested in the healed man breaking a man-made tradition than they were about his being inconceivably healed.

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

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

His Father in Heaven didn't tell Jesus to heal everyone, just this one guy. It had been a surgical-strike healing.

Joh 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."

There are plenty of examples and explanations in the Bible that indicate suffering and sickness are *not* God punishing you for sin. Job is the quintessential example that the righteous suffer.

However, God *can* punish sin. We conclude from Jesus' warning that the healed man had been made infirm *as a direct result of his sin*.

D.A. Carson writes, *"The two clauses, 'Stop sinning' and 'something worse may happen to you,' cannot be interpreted independently. They are tied together: the meaning is 'Stop sinning lest something worse happen to you.' The unavoidable implication is that the bad thing that has already happened was occasioned by the sin which the person must not repeat."*

Should we sin so grace will abound? Perish the thought. But we cannot fear emphasizing grace.

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

Was he an ungrateful snitch? Spurgeon argues that the man was saved. Good enough for me.

Joh 5:16 For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.

We will see mounting tensions as our journey through the Gospel of John continues - Lord willing.

**O**n another occasion Jesus commanded a man with a withered hand, "Stretch out your hand" (Mark 3:5). It inspired hymn writer Albert Benjamin Simpson to write the following lyrics:

*When Christ of old with healing pow'r  
Went forth through all the suffering land,  
His word so oft was wont to be,  
"Stretch forth thy hand, stretch forth thy hand!"  
And though the palsied arm might shrink  
And tremble at the strange command,  
The healing touch was only felt  
While stretching forth the withered hand.  
O suffering one, stretch forth your hand,  
Upon His promise take your stand.  
At His command stretch forth your hand,  
And Christ shall make you whole.*

**Read the Bible believing that you are enabled by it to do what it says.**