

Pick Up Your Mat
January 15, 2023
Allen Power

John 5:5-17

“That was just God!” Ever say that? God is always at work, but sometimes, He makes His work in our lives more evident. If you are a follower of Christ, what causes you to look at a situation and say, *“That was only God?”*

This account of a supernatural healing (the third of Jesus’ seven miraculous signs in John’s Gospel) proves several things:

- Jesus is Lord over all situations and circumstances.
- His compassion and mercy are available to all people.
- He values people more than man-made rules and structures.
- He came to heal more than physical sickness; He came to heal our sin-sickness.

Those are all important truths, but beyond them there is another application: God is always at work but sometimes we are too preoccupied to notice. God is always at work and sometimes our preconceived ideas prevent us from seeing it.

Jesus was in Jerusalem for a Jewish festival. He was walking by two pools near the temple. They called the site Bethesda (meaning house of mercy.) It was a site with covered colonnades where the blind, lame, and paralyzed waited and hoped for healing because of a superstitious belief about the pools. Your translation may jump from verse three to verse five with no verse four. That missing verse is questionable so many translations make it a footnote. It describes the superstition: *...waiting for the moving of the water; ⁴for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred the water: whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had^d*

The pool was likely fed by a spring, which would explain the “moving” of the water. There are no historical accounts of anyone being healed that way in this pool. We DO have a historical account of a miraculous healing without the water.

John 5:5–17 (ESV) — 5 One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. **6** When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” **7** The sick man answered him, “Sir, 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.” **8** Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” **9** And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath. **10** So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” **11** But he answered them, “The man who healed

me, that man said to me, 'Take up your bed, and walk.' ” **12** They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’” **13** Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. **14** Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” **15** The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. **16** And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. **17** But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

- *“Do you want to be healed (after 38 years)?”* What a question! Why do you think Jesus started with the question instead of just going right to, *“Take up your bed and walk?”* The man didn’t say, *“Yes, please!”* What does his response say about how he was seeking to find healing?
- In fairness, there’s no indication he was aware of Who Jesus was.
- Sadly, even Christ-followers sometimes get so focused on the practical side of our problems we fail to ask God to do only what He can do.
- *“Take up your bed and walk!”* Why did Jesus command personal action?
- Though we don’t have supernatural power like Jesus, what is the lesson for us as the “arms and feet” of Jesus?
- How did the man show his gratitude? Why might he have acted this way?
- Let’s speculate on some reasons he rushed off without gratitude. Fill in the blank: *“Jesus changed his life and he was too _____ to notice.”*
- The lesson for us: God is always working for our good and His glory. We need to be paying attention for how He is working and give Him glory!
- How did the man get in trouble with the Jewish religious leaders? What “rule” did he break that upset them? How did the man respond to them?
- Religious leaders had added thirty-nine types of work” forbidden on the Sabbath beyond the commandments in scripture.
- Again, in fairness, the man was clearly intimidated by the Jewish leaders.
- The man told them Jesus (“that man”) healed him. What does their lack of reaction to that fact say about their priorities?
- These legalists were not looking for God at work; they were more concerned about “church rules.”
- Jesus was the promised Messiah they were waiting on and they were too “religious” to understand it. In fact, as we know, they were threatened by it.
- Jesus slipped away not to avoid conflict but to delay it till His timing.
- Later Jesus came looking for the man. Verse 14: *“See, you are well. Do not sin anymore, so that something worse doesn’t happen to you.”*
- We don’t know what his sins were but it is clear that Jesus had moved beyond healing his physical problem to offering to heal his sin problem.
- Surely, now the man would be grateful and share with others about Jesus like the Samaritan woman did, right? How did he “share” instead? (V.15)

- He had to know he was “ratting Jesus out.” Our lesson writer puts it this way: “...*he betrayed the One to whom he owed everything to gain the favor of those he owed nothing.*”ⁱⁱ
- When God has done a dramatic work in our lives we should be eager to share about it even if we risk ridicule or discrimination because of it.
- Being “careful” to give God the glory and credit for what He has done isn’t just a “throw-away phrase” in our prayers; it’s a command in scripture. Psalm 29:2 says, “*Ascribe [attribute] to the Lord the glory due his name...*”ⁱⁱⁱ

So, what’s the Takeaway?

- This incident ends with verses sixteen and seventeen:
John 5:16–17 (ESV) — 16 And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. **17** But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”
- Jesus and the Father are always working in our world. In the case of this hopeless, lame man that work meant miraculous healing.
- We said, this teaches us several important truths:
 - Jesus is Lord over all situations and circumstances.
 - His compassion and mercy are available to all people.
 - He values people more than man-made rules and structures.
 - He came to heal more than physical sickness; He came to heal our sin-sickness.
- Beyond those truths there is another application: God is always at work but sometimes we don’t notice. God is always at work and sometimes our preconceived ideas prevent us from seeing it.
- Jesus commanded the man to DO something to receive his healing (“...take up your bed and walk.”) The man may have never trusted Christ, but trying to stand on atrophied legs did take some faith. God expects us to do our part in trusting Him to do what we need.
- Was the man too self-centered or too preoccupied to give God credit for totally changing his life? We don’t really know the motive for his ingratitude, but we know for sure he feared ticking off the religious leaders.
- What about those Jewish leaders? They were more concerned about carrying a mat on the Sabbath than learning Who had healed this man.
- “*I got healed after 38 years!*” “*That’s beside the point! Why are you carrying that mat on the Sabbath!*”
- Jesus was ushering in the Kingdom of God and they were too “religious” to understand it much less to give Him the credit and glory He deserves.
- What’s the lesson for us? We should never be so focused on our problems that we stop watching for God at work to solve them.
- Expecting God to do what is best for us is foundational to faith in Christ.
- We should focus on looking for how He is working and give Him all the credit and the glory by sharing with others how He has changed our lives.
- When we see His hand at work our natural reaction should be to say with enthusiasm: “*That was just God! There is no other explanation!*”

ⁱ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

ⁱⁱ Explore the Bible Leaders Guide – Lifeway 2022

ⁱⁱⁱ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ps 29:2). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.