

John 5a 5:1-16 Healing at the pool of Bethesda

(You might like to substitute a river known to you!)

If I said to you 'Go and explore the river Dart as far as Totnes', each of you might approach it in a different way. Some would want a boat – rowing, sailing or motor. Others would prefer to stay on dry land. Some might even put on diving gear and look under the surface. Personally, I'd like a helicopter.

The results of your exploration would all be different, but would all add up to a better understanding for all of us. One might tell me that Galmpton Creek is mostly mud flats with a variety of wading birds feeding around the boats that are aground there. Another will say there's no mud - they sailed right up to the jetty wall at the end and the boats were afloat at their moorings.

Who is right? Both – (at different states of the tide). So it will be with this study. We will have to hold apparently contradictory facts 'in tension' without discounting either.

Hopefully in John chapter 5 we will get a feel for what's going on without getting too stuck in the mud. ([At this point you could read the whole chapter](#))

Read John 5 v1-16

1 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3 Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralysed. 5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" 7 "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no-one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." 8 Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." 9 At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, 10 and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." 11 But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' " 12 So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" 13 The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. 14 Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." 15 The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. 16 So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him.

Find the map of Jerusalem at <http://www.bible.ca/maps/maps-jerusalem-33AD.jpg> You may copy this map freely for bible study purposes.

Before we study these scriptures we need to look at the verse which is missing! – the second part of verse 3, and verse 4:

and they waited for the moving of the waters. 4 From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease he had.

There is evidence that the pool was used as an asclepieion. This was effectively a place of healing dedicated to the Greek god Asclepius. He was a god of healing and his cult had attracted followers from about 300bc. His rod, a snake-entwined staff, remains a symbol of medicine today.

The pool of Bethesda was created in 800bc by damming a stream just to the north of the Sheep Gate entrance to the Temple. This created a reservoir and a channel was then constructed to bring a constant stream of water into the city. In 200bc another pool was added. In the 1st Century bc natural caves were incorporated as small baths and the site was dedicated to the Greek god of healing. In 135ad the Roman Emperor Hadrian built a temple to Asclepius on the same site.

It is likely therefore that people visiting the pool for healing did so as part of the worship of this god – or at least they attributed healings to him. Some early bible copyists and translators said that these people were waiting for the *troubling of the water*, and some tried to suggest that this was not a pagan setting and introduced an angel who would occasionally stir the waters, and the first person to enter would then be cured.

Both these are considered to be unreliable additions and have been removed from the NIV.

So first let's look at the actual healing. The story is quite well known but there has always been a question in my mind. It's this:

Why did Jesus pick this man from among the others?

Read John 5:1-2

1 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.

Jesus was on his way from Galilee to the Temple at Jerusalem for one of the Feasts (John 4:54). He was entering Jerusalem from the North and would have had to pass the Pool of Bethesda. He deliberately turned aside to find this man.

5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

7 "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no-one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

8 Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."

What does the word 'learned' mean (v6)?

I wonder if Jesus had actually asked who had been there the longest, in order to demonstrate the fact that his healing was immediate.

Now notice that the man made no declaration of faith, and Jesus had no physical contact with him. These are often considered important parts of a miraculous healing but here they are absent. The man had been there for 38 years hoping a Greek god will heal him. A stranger approaches and says 'Get up'. The man is healed!

It seems there are two distinct sections in this chapter – The healing of the man, and Jesus' teaching that followed it.

How many planes does Jesus operate on at the same time? Can he have several reasons for the same action?

The healing of this man was very specifically for the benefit of the man and possibly also as a witness to those around him who were hoping for healing. But it was also important for what was to follow – so important that this healing is recorded here for us. The other gospels do not mention this miracle – why not? Perhaps only John recognised its significance.

Jesus healed the man and instructed him to carry his bedding on the Sabbath. **Did he realise the results of his instruction?**

Of course; and on one level the healing was carried out in order to bring about the confrontation that followed.

I can picture a man who has been an invalid for nearly 40 years. Being cured must have been such a shock it would have taken some time before he could accept it. Obviously his heart must have been full of gratitude. But he had no idea who had healed him.

He left the pool and joined the road. Right, to the north, led to open country, and Samaria. Left led to the Sheep Gate of the Temple and the rest of Jerusalem. So he turned left. It was the only logical direction. It was also where Jesus was heading.

But carrying his mat into the Temple grounds was asking for trouble.
Look at v9-16

9 At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, 10 and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."

11 But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'"

12 So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?"

13 The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

14 Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.
 16 So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him.

When the Jews ask the man ‘who is this fellow?’ he has to admit that he has no idea. Jesus had deliberately kept away from him as he made his way to the Temple, but now he returns to specifically find that man for the second time. V14 *Jesus found him*

Can someone explain verse 14 to me? “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”

(See also: John 9:2-3

2 His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

3 “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.)

What was a Jew doing spending 38 years in a Pagan place of healing when the Temple of God was only 400 yards away?

How has this man survived for 38 years? Who has fed him? Why?

Does Jesus know something about his thoughts and motives? Is this a warning as the man begins to look for work for the first time for 38 years?

What choices will the first day of the new week bring for him?

But on another level it was important that the man could identify Jesus to the Jews as the one who had not only healed him but had instructed him to carry his bedding on the Sabbath.

Jesus was going to use this occasion not only to heal the man, but to give the teaching that occupies the rest of this chapter

This wasn’t so much a ‘set up’ healing, but Jesus knew exactly what would happen as a result and he was ready for the aggressive confrontation that followed: *the Jews persecuted him* (v16). What was their problem? v16 explains it:

*Because **Jesus** was doing these things*

Indignation – who does he think he is?

*Because **Jesus was doing these things***

Jealousy – why is he so special? How is it he can heal?

That was probably what was behind it,

but ‘**on the Sabbath**’ gave them the excuse to accuse him.

Jesus now compounds the offence v17: *Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."*

Did the Jews understand what Jesus was saying? (See v 18)

Jesus knew they would be upset by his 'breaking the Sabbath', but explained it by claiming equality with God, and therefore having God's authority to make or repeal Laws. To the Jews this was intolerable. The possibility that his claims might be true was unthinkable.

The Jews had got their religion all sewn up

First there was God,

then his commandments, the Torah

then the interpretation of the law, the tradition of the Elders, (Which became the Mishnah)

then the Scribes & Pharisees' application of that

then the people

Draw on board

GOD	GOD'S LAW	Tradition of The Elders (Interpretation)	Scribes & Pharisees (Application)	People
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Jesus' claims redrew the picture leaving them with no status

Add:

GOD	JESUS	PEOPLE
	GOD'S LAW	

Why has Jesus set up this confrontation? Because these are the leaders and teachers of the people and they were leading the people astray. He needed them, above all people to understand: *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life (v24).*

Four things to learn from Jesus before we continue (**Have pre-written on board, but hidden until now**)

- 1 Do not keep back truth because it may endanger you.
- 2 Do not keep back truth because it will annoy sinners.
- 3 If truth annoys hypocrites, they will be more annoyed the more they hear.
- 4 Truth accepted will set people free.