



First Baptist Church At The Villages

Jesus: Seeing & Believing • Healing on the Sabbath • John 5:1-17 •

For Use By Groups 3/8 through 3/14/2020

MAIN POINT

Jesus' lordship and redemption lead us to tell others about Him.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Share a time when you've prayed earnestly for something to happen and had to keep praying for a long time.

Did you give up praying after a while? Why or why not?

It's easy to become complacent in our spiritual life. Although we begin with good intentions, many of us quickly get used to things being the way they are. Our prayers become less frequent. But God doesn't want us to be complacent, and He doesn't want us to be reluctant to share the gospel with others. Because Jesus is the Lord, we should not be complacent. Instead, we should be moved to tell others about Him.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read John 5:1-4.

Try to imagine the area around this pool. What do you think it would have looked, sounded, and smelled like?

Why did people come to this pool, day in and day out?

Imagine you had a loved one who was ill. What would make you want to take him or her to a pool like this?

One can only imagine the desperation of the people coming to the pool of Bethesda each day. These were people with, as John told us, a multitude of infirmities. They were sick or blind or lame or paralyzed. They'd nearly given up all hope—but they believed an angel stirred the water of the pool each day at a certain time, and when it did, those who got into the pool first would be healed. Whether this was actually happening or not, we don't know. But it does tell us the state of mind of many people there.

| Have another volunteer read John 5:5-9.

What does verse five tell us about this man?

Imagine you were at this pool and Jesus asked if you wanted to be made well. How would you respond?

Reread his response to Jesus' question. What does it tell us about his attitude?

This man had been ill for 38 years. We don't know what exactly was wrong with him or how long he'd been coming to this pool. But he seemed to have all but given up hope that he'd ever be healed. He knew he couldn't get into the pool on his own, and there was no one there willing to help him. He seemed resigned to his chronic illness, even when offered assistance by the Son of God Himself.

Read Ephesians 2:8-9. How is his situation like our own need for a Savior?

Why do you think it's hard for people to accept Christ's free gift of grace?

What do you think was going through the man's mind as he picked up his mat and walked away?

Just as it's easy for us to become complacent and assume that our situations are never going to change, it's also easy for us to be content with a response to the thing we think we wanted. The man at the pool wanted to be healed and Jesus did so. But physical healing wasn't all Jesus wanted for this man. Jesus wanted to repair his heart.

| Have another volunteer read John 5:10-17.

Why did John specifically mention that this event happened on the Sabbath?

What were God's people to do on this day?

Why do you think the man who was healed didn't know who told him to pick up his mat and go home?

The Sabbath was intended as a day of rest—it was a gift for man, made by God. On this day, God's people were to do no work, but there were no restrictions in the Law about caring for the sick or helping others. The Pharisees had added their own traditions to God's Law, declaring even the tiniest violation a flagrant disregard for the Lord.

Read verse 17 and Matthew 12:1-8. How was Jesus' view of the Sabbath different than the Pharisees?

Jesus told the Jews that He was doing what His Father was doing—His Father was working on the Sabbath, and so was He. He was (and is) the Lord of the Sabbath. Whatever He did on the Sabbath was right, even when it violated the traditions of man.

Why would Jesus exercising His lordship anger the Jewish leaders?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Jesus' encounter with the man at the pool didn't end on a high note. The man at first seemed content only to have been healed physically. It was only after he was confronted first by the Jews who accused him of violating the Law and then by Jesus that he began to tell others who had healed him. Jesus heals our greatest need—he heals our hearts. He redeems us, renews us, restores us. This is the Father's work that He is doing. And as people who are redeemed, He expects us to go and tell others about Him.

Are you reluctant to tell people about Jesus?

What fears do you have about sharing Christ with others?

How can this lesson practically encourage us as we share the gospel with those around us?

PRAYER

Close in prayer, thanking God for the signs Jesus performed during His ministry. Praise Jesus for bringing healing, for rescuing and redeeming us so that we may sin no more. Pray that you and your group members would joyfully, as redeemed people, go and tell the lost the good news about Jesus.

COMMENTARY

| John 5:1-17

5:1–3. As chapter 5 opens, John made a geographical switch from Galilee to Jerusalem and specifically the Pool of Bethesda, a gathering place for invalids. Apparently the pool was located in the northeast corner of the old city. It functioned under considerable local superstition as a place with miraculous healing powers.

John also dropped a vague chronological note when he observed it was feast time. Many interpreters argue this was a second Passover, but Tasker warns, “If we adopt the better-attested reading a feast in v. 1, which now has the additional support of the Bodmer Papyrus, the reference could be to any feast, and there is no need to assume, as many commentators do, that the chapters have been dislocated, and to attempt to restore the ‘original’ order by placing chapter 4 before chapter 5.

Many suggestions have been offered as a substitute for the Passover—Pentecost, Purim, Dedication, Trumpets. But two arguments persist: a recognition of this feast as the Passover would stretch the record of John through three and one-half years, a figure commonly preferred by most evangelical Bible scholars for the earthly ministry of Jesus.

Also, it was an important enough feast to draw Jesus back to Jerusalem and we must consider that impact. Borchert indicates that the strong emphasis on Sabbath in this chapter may be the key to recognizing a Passover feast here. He says, “The problem with searching for a name for the unnamed feast is that it involves filling in what is perceived to be a chronological gap in John, failing to realize the theological nature of these festival statements and the cyclical pattern that focuses these chapters on Passover.”

5:4. The fourth verse has no significant textual support and is therefore omitted by the NIV, although some will be familiar with wording from the KJV describing the angel who would stir up the waters and the hope that the first person in the pool after such a swirling would be healed.

5:5–7. As in Sychar and Cana, Jesus focused on a single individual, this time a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years. He asked the crucial question, Do you want to get well? The man responded by raising the obvious problem. He could not get well because he could not get down to the healing pool fast enough. The man had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. Why did Jesus choose him now, and why him from among all the other disabled people gathered around the pool? The only possible answer is God’s sovereign grace. In the Father’s timing, this was the

time, the place, and the way he would heal this man. The length and extent of the man's illness presented no problem for Jesus.

We tend to think that time produces hopelessness. Surely the longer a person is sick, the less likely that he or she will get well. The longer a person has lived in sin, the less likely that person will come to Christ. We have all the statistics to show that we must win people to Christ when they are young or the chances diminish. The argument is sound on the basis of what we know, bolstered by human experience. But God is the master of difficult situations just like this one. What is humanly impossible, God loves to do. Perhaps Jesus intentionally chose the veteran Bethesda-pool invalid to prove his divine grace. Even today God may choose difficult people through whom he will prove his grace.

5:8–9a. These verses describe the miraculous cure. The original question in verse 6 focused on the man's infatuation with magical powers and traditional superstition. If the pool had really been God's healing agent, Jesus could have just helped the man in the water first after the angelic stirring. But the words Get up! Pick up your mat and walk emphasize that Jesus was the source of divine healing, not some kind of wave pool. When you are really sick, miracle is preferable to magic.

We dare not miss the absence of faith here. The man did not ask for help; he showed no faith that John reports; and he did not even know who Jesus was. Contrast this miracle with the royal official's son in John 4. Let us notice too that the Lord's ministry was not primarily social, just as ours is not. He had the power to clean out the entire pool area. Not a single invalid could have survived the power of God. But he healed only one man, and that seems to have been done to form a basis for the message to follow. Throughout this book I will refer to this process as the miracle-message method in which a "selective" miracle lays the groundwork for a sermon. We see it here regarding authority over the Sabbath, in chapter 6 where the feeding of the five thousand forms the basis for the sermon on the bread of life. We also see it in chapter 9 where the healing of the blind man leads to a sermon on spiritual blindness followed by the sermon on the good shepherd in chapter 10, and finally in chapter 11 where the healing of Lazarus leads to a sermon on life.

Hot Springs National Park has warm and relaxing facilities—but no ultimate cure. Yet it has drawn millions to that site. But God does not need "stirring pools" to work in our lives. We do not need crosses around our necks, a saintly figurine on the car dashboard, or even oil on the head for healing. Sometimes God wants us to ask as the royal official did. And sometimes he asks for faith before he acts. But God does not need our help, our permission, or even our faith when he chooses to work in our lives or in the lives of our loved ones.

5:9b–10. Jesus performed this miracle on the Sabbath and that became the point of argument in the next four chapters. Why the fuss over a day? Because people want rules, not grace. They want to boast about what they did to earn merit from God. This attitude opposes the gospel. Luke mentioned the Sabbath only nine times in Acts, and not once in connection with Christian worship. But the Pharisees could not get over this hurdle which troubled them during the entire time of Jesus' life on earth.

This dramatic healing attracted the typical reaction from the Jews—a phrase uncommon to the Synoptics but used seventy times in John, usually to describe religious leaders opposing Christ. The New Testament is not anti-Semitic. Jesus wept over Jerusalem and constantly proclaimed the Gospel to any Jews who would listen. Paul went from synagogue to synagogue offering salvation to his own people first.

The Sabbath, of course, was always the seventh day (and is so today) never the first, though we sometimes incorrectly refer to Sunday in this way. This issue dominates the next four chapters of John as the hypocrisy and formalism of religious observance link the first century with our modern time.

This was no accident—Jesus did not just forget it was Saturday. He was not ignorant of the provision that the rabbis had added to God's Sabbath law: "Whoever on the Sabbath brings anything in or takes anything out from a public place to a private one, if he has done this inadvertently, he shall sacrifice for his sins; but if willingly, he shall be cut off and shall be stoned." The scribes had come up with thirty-nine tasks prohibited on the Sabbath. Certainly Jesus knew that healing on the Sabbath would upset the religious leaders. He knew that by commanding the man to carry his mat out of a public place he would anger them even more. So why did he do it? The dialogue rages over the next several chapters, but the central idea has to do with the authority of Jesus as the Son of God.

5:11–13. In these three verses we see how little the man actually knew. This startling stranger had walked into his life, given him back normality in his legs, and then disappeared. The man's reply to the Jews (doubtless the leaders of the Sanhedrin) reflected his willing obedience, reminiscent of the royal official in chapter 4. The exchange betrayed the Jewish leaders' shallow understanding of theology; they focused on the carried mat, not the new legs.

5:14–17. The innocent response is followed by the final warning—a brief section of a verse which fits significantly into the miracle-message method John records so carefully. Indeed, John 5:14 must be compared theologically with John 9:3. In the first case, one must conclude that the lameness was caused by sin; and in the second, clearly the blindness was not. The Greek text might better be translated, "Give up sinning." The something worse could refer to a physical

illness more burdensome than the one the man had carried for so many years, or it might suggest spiritual disaster, even eternal condemnation.