

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

Senior Pastor Titus Green

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Seven Miraculous Signs of Jesus from the Gospel of John

Helpless Men, Hopeless Religion and the Glory of Jesus

John 5:1-18

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This morning, we are continuing our study of the miracles of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Remember, these miracles are signs because they point to a reality beyond themselves. They point to the truth about Jesus so that we will believe in Him and experience the life that only He can give – abundant life that lasts forever.

Today, we will be looking at the third miraculous sign of Jesus. And, before we read our text, let me give you our big idea so you can look for it in the passage.

BIG IDEA: JESUS ACCOMPLISHES THE WORK OF GOD THAT HELPLESS MEN AND HOPELESS RELIGION ARE POWERLESS TO DO.

John 5:1–18

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. 3 In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. 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said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk’?” 13 Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. 14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well!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.” 18 This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

I hope you can see where I’m getting my big idea. There is a helpless man who had been paralyzed for 38 years. There are the religious leaders who are peddling a hopeless version of religion that only offered rigid rules with no power, no pity, no compassion or celebration. Not only did they do nothing to help this man, they couldn’t even rejoice when Jesus healed him.

But, alongside a helpless man and hopeless religion, you have Jesus. He’s the focal point of this story. And the last couple verses of our text highlight the truth about Jesus that John wants us to know.

John 5:17-18

But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Jesus says He is working alongside the Father. And that sets the religious leaders into overdrive in their quest to kill Jesus. Why would that make them so angry?

Well, there's something much deeper going on here than just the fact the religious leaders think Jesus broke their rules for Sabbath. When Jesus says God the Father has always been working, most scholars believe Jesus is saying that God has always worked on the Sabbath.

Even though God ceased from His work of creating the universe on the seventh day, He did not cease doing His work as God. He sustains the universe by His power. He makes it rain on Sabbath. He provides breath and life for His creatures on the Sabbath. In other words, God never takes a break from being God.

Then Jesus says that He is at work, too. And this is what drove the religious leaders to the point of hating Jesus. He's telling them that He isn't breaking the Sabbath because He is doing the work of God. And not just the work God told Him to do, but the actual work of being God on the Sabbath. Jesus is claiming to be equal with God the Father and He's saying that, like the Father, He doesn't take a day off from being God.

And the religious leaders know exactly what He's saying. That's why verse 18 says they doubled down on their commitment to kill Him. They knew what He was saying. He was saying that He is God and equal with God the Father. That's the primary point of this sign. Jesus is God and does the work of God.

So, that's why I say the point of this passage is that Jesus does the work of God that helpless men and hopeless religion are powerless to do. That's the point. Now, let's walk back through our text and see what we learn about how Jesus works as God.

Jesus has come back to Jerusalem. And, on His way into the city, He passes through an area where there was a pool called Bethesda. Bethesda means “house of mercy.” At this pool, there was a multitude of invalids who believed that the waters of this pool had healing powers.

If you are reading a modern translation, you might notice that it skips verse 4. There's likely a note explaining most ancient manuscripts omit a line about an angel stirring the waters and the first person who entered the pool would be healed. Let me give you some context for why that's not included in our modern translations.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek. Our English versions are translated from a group of ancient hand-copied manuscripts. We have almost 6,000 ancient Greek manuscripts with the oldest dating back a few decades after the originals. There's nothing else like that in ancient literature.

And not only is there a massive collection of ancient manuscripts, but there is also amazing agreement between them. I'm talking 99% agreement.

Of the places where there are discrepancies, the vast majority are owing to variations in how someone copied the text – like leaving out the ‘o’ in John or copying “Jesus Christ” as “Christ Jesus.” However, a few of the discrepancies are known as “marginal notes.”

Think of it this way. I make lots of notes in the margins of my bibles with observations about the text or explanations I’ve heard about a passage. How many of you do that? Now, imagine that we all had copied the Bible by hand. All the verses would be in our handwriting along with all our notes and comments. 500 years from now, if someone picked up our handwritten copies of the bible, they would have to make thousands of decisions about what is Biblical text and what are marginal notes. What are God’s words and what are the words of the people who copied God’s words?

And one of the ways they would do that is by gathering as many copies as they could find and comparing them to see what is included in all of them (which would be the text of Scripture) and what is unique to one or two or three of them (which would be a marginal note).

And that’s exactly what Bible translators have done. As they’ve compared the most reliable ancient manuscripts, they’ve determined verse 4 is most likely a marginal note that was added to try and explain why the paralyzed man says in verse 7 that he never can get into the pool first.

Whether verse 4 was originally in the text or not, the truth remains the same: this man spent years of his life hoping the pool could do something for him that only Jesus can do.

That’s my best 5-minute crash course on textual criticism and the work of modern Bible translators. Picking up the story in verse 5, Jesus walks up to this multitude and singles out one individual, the man in our text.

And that’s the first of 5 things we see about how Jesus does the work of God...

1. Jesus Knows and Cares about Individuals

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,

When Jesus looks at the multitude, He doesn’t just see a group of nameless faces. He sees individuals. And He doesn’t just see individuals. He knows them. He knows their stories and struggles. He knows their pain and disappointment. And He cares. **Psalm 139** says He is intimately acquainted with all our thoughts and every detail of our lives.

Think about that for a moment. When Jesus looks at the 8 billion people of this world, He sees you. He knows your story and your struggles. He knows your pain and disappointment. Your secret worries and hidden fears and suppressed memories. He knows the pressure you feel and the burdens you bear. And He cares. He doesn’t love the world in general and no one in particular. He knows and loves you. He cares that you are lonely. He cares that you are tired. He cares that you are hurting or overwhelmed or weary or at the end of your rope.

1 Peter 5:7 says to cast all your anxieties upon Him. Why? Because He cares about you and He can handle it.

- How might it change your heart today if you truly believed Jesus sees, knows, cares, and has a plan for what you are walking through right now?

Jesus sees and knows and cares about you.

2. Jesus Takes the First Step

6 When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him...

Jesus didn't sit back and wait for this man to come to Him. Jesus initiated the encounter. Jesus took the first step.

And that's how Jesus works in all our lives. John 1 and Ephesians 2 and Romans 5 all say that while we were dead in our sin, Jesus came to us. While we were still sinners, Christ entered this world to die for us. He came to seek and to save those who are lost.

It's no accident that you are in this place today. While you may have chosen to be here, the reality is that Jesus has been coming for you all your life.

A few years ago, I shared the gospel with a man who had lived his whole life in rebellion against God. But, when he heard the gospel of Jesus, he gave his heart to Christ right then and there. And as I talked to him about his decision to follow Christ, he began to describe what was going on in his life. His marriage was struggling. His job was dissatisfying. His addiction to alcohol was destroying him. He had been running from God his whole life. But, in spite of all that, he said he couldn't shake the feeling that God was coming after him. As fast as he was running away from God, something in him felt like God was running even faster to catch him. The day I shared the gospel with him was the day he decided to stop running.

Though he was a man on the run, he was also like the man in our text - he didn't come looking for Jesus, Jesus came looking for him. The paralyzed man wasn't made well because he had amazing faith, he was made well because Jesus has amazing grace.

And the same is true for you and me. If there's a desire in our hearts to hear the truth about Jesus and know the person of Jesus, it's not because we've been on the hunt for Jesus. It's because Jesus has been on the hunt for us. He always takes the first step and makes the first move. He stepped out of heaven and entered this world to seek and to save those who were lost.

And there are two responses to this truth.

First, if you haven't given your life to Jesus, stop running from your Savior. Stop resisting. Look at the cross of Jesus and consider just how far Jesus came to find you and rescue you. Place your faith and trust in Jesus and surrender your life to Him as your Lord.

Second, if you have given your heart to Jesus, stop boasting in yourself. What do we have to take pride in? We were lost and He found us. We were drowning and He jumped in to save us. We were running from Him but couldn't outrun His grace. We only love because He first loved us and came to us in our sin. So give thanks to Jesus – He took the first step. He came to us.

3. Jesus Starts with the Heart

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?"

Does that sound like a strange thing to ask a man who has been lying by the healing waters of a pool for a long, long time? Why would Jesus ask that? Because Jesus is getting to the heart of the matter.

And the man's response says a lot. He essentially points to the fact that he's helpless to change. He wants to, but he can't. There's no better place to be than before Jesus acknowledging that you can't do it. But he doesn't just say he is a helpless man. He says he doesn't have anyone else to help him. Think about it. He lives in the most religious city in the world – Jerusalem. He's in the shadow of the Temple. But there's no one to help so he has no hope. He needs something helpless men and hopeless religion can't provide. He says, "I can't do it."

Sadly, many people refuse to come to that place. They live in denial, believing they can do it on their own and coming up with all the excuses in the world as to why they haven't. If you've come to the end of yourself today, you couldn't be in a better place. Look to Jesus and admit the truth: you don't have the power to change on your own.

But the reality is that many people simply don't want to change.

There are people who could be healed by Jesus, but deep down they don't want the change that comes with being healed. Some of us are bitter and don't want to forgive the person that hurt us and they don't want the change forgiveness might bring to our relationship. There of us struggle with addiction and don't want to be healed because we really don't want to leave our drug behind. Some of us have experienced wounds and injustice that have become so central to our identity that we can't imagine life beyond them.

Please don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying the road will be easy or that there won't be ups and downs along the way. I'm saying that when it comes to the healing power of Jesus in the places of our struggle and pain and our own sin, Jesus goes straight to the heart and asks, "Do you really want to be healed or is all your talk just talk?"

Jesus doesn't heal this man against his will. And He won't heal you that way, either. Do you really want to be free from bitterness? From perpetual victimhood? From addiction? From anger? From materialism and greed?

Do you really want to leave that lifestyle behind and start a new chapter?

Jesus isn't interested in our talk. He's interested in our hearts.

4. Jesus Empowers the Impossible

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.

This almost sounds cruel. Who would walk up to a man who has been paralyzed for nearly 40 years and tell him to get up, pack up his stuff, and walk away? You'd never do that to a disabled man.

But Jesus does. Jesus commands the impossible. Not because He is cruel, but because He is compassionate. You see, whatever Jesus commands, He empowers. He miraculously gives us the power to actually do whatever He says, even though it's impossible for us.

Philippians 2:12-13

Obey/work out your salvation FOR/BECAUSE God is at work in you to will and do according to His good pleasure...

Whatever Jesus commands, He empowers...

Then, we are left with a choice. Will we believe Jesus or not? Just think about what had to happen in this man to experience the miracle. He had to believe that Jesus had actually changed him. He had to believe that he could finally do something that he hadn't been able to do before. He literally had to take a step of obedience by faith in the power of Jesus. **THAT'S CHRISTIANITY 101. THAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HOPELESS RELIGION AND THE POWER OF JESUS CHRIST.**

And that leads us to the last thing we see in this text about the work of Jesus...

5. Jesus Addresses our Deepest Need

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."

Jesus follows His command to walk with another even more impossible command: ***sin no more.***

Jesus didn't come to this man to simply heal his physical issues. Jesus came to address his greatest need. And the deepest need we all have is rooted in our problem with sin. We have all sinned against God and our sin has created a separation between us and God. There's something far greater than living this life with broken bodies, it's entering eternity separated from God in our sin.

And just like the man in our text, we are helpless to solve our sin problem. And empty religion is hopeless – it can't solve our sin problem. That's why we need Jesus. And we don't just need Jesus, we have Him. God so loved this world that He gave His Son to live and die in our place so we could be forgiven and freed from sin.

And the same Jesus that can raise a paralyzed man to a brand-new life has the power to raise us from the power of our sin. That's the promise of the Gospel. Jesus not only came to give His life for us, He came to live His life through us. He came to empower the impossible so that we can live the kind of holy life that only Jesus is able to live.

This is what our world, and many so-called Christians, don't understand about Jesus. He doesn't just command us to do the impossible. He empowers us to do the impossible.

His commands are invitations to experience His power.

He isn't being cruel when He tells angry people to let go of their anger. He isn't being cruel when He tells victims to move beyond the identity of victimhood. He isn't being cruel when He tells us to lay aside all of our complaining or grumbling or discontentment. He isn't being cruel when He tells people in sexual sin to step into His design for sex to be between one man and one woman in a lifetime covenant of marriage. He isn't being cruel when He tells us to give thanks in every circumstance or to love our enemies or to tell a hostile world the good news of His gospel. He's inviting us to experience His power to do what is otherwise impossible for us.

That's the work Jesus desires to do in you as God. He desires to empower you to do the impossible. He's calling us to take step after step in faith, believing He will give us His power to live a brand-new kind of life.

Jesus empowers the impossible in the place of our deepest need.

So, what impossible command of God's word is hanging over your life today? In your marriage? With your kids? At your work or school?

What would it look like if you really believed Jesus will empower you to do what you can't do on your own?