

JESUS OFFERS LIFE



An Exegesis and Sermon
on John 5:1-15

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INTRODUCTION

John 5:1-15 has a story of a man who was healed after having been an invalid for thirty-eight years. This story is unique to John even though there may have been other miracles like it which are not recorded (John 20:30). John's record of healing is noticeably similar to the account of a paralytic's healing in the Synoptics (Mt 9:1-8, Lk 5:17-26 and Mk 2:1-12). There are two contrasting issues that strike the reader in John's account. One sees a lack of initial faith by the paralytic (5:13a) and notices that the miracle is initiated by Jesus (5:6). Compare this with Matthew's gospel where *none* of the miracles of healing are initiated by Jesus.

John reports miracles sparingly. This is unlike Mark whose volume of miracles is nearly fifty per cent of the text. Yet when John recounts a miracle, many times it is connected with a discourse or an "ego eimi" saying to drive home the theological point. For instance, to support the claim "I am the light of the world" (8:12), Jesus heals a blind man (John 9). In John 11 Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead after claiming "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25). John 5 is no different. Jesus is Life-Giver and Judge, thus equal with God (5:21-23). Jesus demonstrates his sovereignty by selecting one out of so many possibilities to heal. John shows that Jesus has perfect timing as the Savior heals the invalid on the Sabbath. Jesus restores physical life with the promise of spiritual wholeness.

After the dramatic healing (5:1-9a), the author goes on to deal with the Sabbath controversy which is raised almost as an afterthought by introducing it late (verse 9b). It does seem to be a pattern, though, because the same sequence occurs in John 9 at verse 14. Once we get to verse 9b "the Sabbath theme dominates the account of the miracle and its aftermath" (Moloney 1996:3). The word *feast* is used seventeen times in John. Matthew and Mark use it only twice, while Luke has *feast* only three times. "Apparently one of John's minor aims is to

show his readers that Jesus perfectly fulfilled all that the feasts typified. What they symbolized he brought into existence” (Morris 1986:165). This is very much how John treats signs. The content of verses 16-30 are concerned with the Jews’ persecution of Jesus, Jesus’ equality with God (5:18), and a discourse on life and judgment in the hands of Jesus.

When the author of the Gospel of John speaks, one is not always sure at what level he is to be understood. Nicodemus was certainly confused about what Jesus meant when he said, “I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (3:3). The Samaritan woman at the well initially was equally confused about who Jesus was and what Jesus was really offering (4:10). Jesus’ teaching in Capernaum on the “bread of life” (6:25-59) was also misunderstood. Even though expectations of Jesus may be at one level (help into the pool), “Jesus responds in a way better than and different from that expectation” (Craddock 1982:42).

In John’s gospel there is the arena of the flesh (what appears to be), and there is glory and truth as revealed by the Divine Logos. God through Jesus, not only created this *kosmos*, but continues to heal it of *all* its sickness through His Word. There are probably two levels the writer of the Gospel wants us to explore. Two examples in our text as it relates to life and death would be the repeating idea of wholeness (5:4, 6, 9, 11, 14, 15), and the kind of hearing the author means in 5:24-25, 28. “The natural phenomena of life and death on this earth recede in his thought behind a metaphysical interpretation of ‘life’ and ‘death’” (Schnackenburg 1982:109).

From the very first verse of the Gospel of John we are told that Jesus is equal with God and dwelt among us to show us God (1:14, 18). It must have been frustrating for Jesus at times when those closest to him did not really see (John 14:9-14), but “it is the grand goal of the Fourth Gospel to trace the miracle of Jesus’ work to the miracle of his person and to bring out that *because* he is the Christ, the Son of God, he gives life to everyone who believes in him” (Ridderbos 1997:195). The internally stated purpose of the Gospel is clear, and should be taken as the primary reason for the author’s effort (John 20:30-31).

1. CONTEXT OF JESUS' HEALING MINISTRY

Historical and Contemporary Understanding of Miracles of Healing

Miracles of healing appear in Scripture as early as Genesis 21, where Abraham and Sarah were miraculously enabled to produce natural offspring. Throughout the Old Testament, God and His representatives produced miracles. Also through this time period God's people were introduced to false religions with their various pagan practices by the Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans.

By the time we get to New Testament times, belief in pagan deities was commonplace. Luke wrote that Athens was "full of idols" (Acts 17:16). "These idols were not ones tucked away from public sight in their temples, but rather these were public visual images" (Gill/Gempf 1994:443). Paul was telling the Athenians that he perceived them as very religious, or possibly superstitious (δεισιδαιμονεστερους). Paul was being intentionally ambiguous, but respectful of the Athenians religious endeavors no matter how misguided (Larkin 1995:255).

Rome and Epidaurus had their own deities like Asclepius, a god of healing. "Unlike other gods, Asclepius was sympathetic to human suffering. A serpent around a walking stick evolved into the modern symbol of the medical profession" (Ferguson 1993:209). Ephesus is yet another place connected with healing. We are familiar with the *Ephesia grammata* ("Ephesian letters") which were reported to produce special healings through secret words (Ferguson 1993:216).

Tactitus and Seutonius claimed that the Roman Emperor, Vespasian, was involved in the healing of a blind man and another man with a diseased hand (Barclay 61:1969). So even human beings were seen as having the power to heal.

Here in John 5 the air was thick with expectation that an angel might affect a

healing for those swift enough to enter the pool first (vv. 4, 7). It is easy to understand how verse 4 could have been added to the text to explain verse 7, even though verse 4 cannot be a part of the original text (Metzger 1971:209). It also is never recorded in the NT that an angel ever affected any healing. People thought angels controlled nature, including bodies of water (Bultmann 1971:241) not unlike pools where we find healings taking place (John 5:2; 9:7). Haenchen calls this pool a “Jewish Lourdes” (1984:258).

Lourdes France is a place where thousands of miracles have been reported to the Roman Catholic Church, but only about 66 cures have been sanctioned as “miracles.” There have been no *official* miracles since 1987. For the invalid in John 5, I wonder how long it had been since there had been a “verified” healing. The ageless question remains as to why one is picked over another for any gift, but especially the gift of healing.

The Place of Healing

In 5:2 there are two significant textual variants concerning the place of healing. The first discrepancy is regarding *επι τη προβατικη κολυμβηθρα*. Metzger gives this fragment a {B} rating. “A difficulty arises because a word must be supplied and because *ΚΟΛΥΜΒΗΘΡΑ* can be taken nominative, qualified by *η επιλεγομενη* (“In Jerusalem, near the sheep [...], there is a *pool* which is called...”) or as a dative, qualified by *τη προβατικη*” (Metzger 207-08:1975). In other words we could have a sheep gate or a sheep pool (Rienecker 228-29:1980). There is reference in Nehemiah 3:32; 12:39 to Sheep Gate. This is near the Inspection Gate where animals would pass through to be later sacrificed in temple ceremonies.

The fact John uses “is” with reference to the pool may mean the gospel was written before 70 C.E. although John sometimes uses the present tense while really speaking of the past (Morris 1986:165). None of this may definitively help in setting the date for John. Jeremias says the pool “remained a place of healing after A.D. 70, as is proved by votive offerings found there - (and) must have been much sought after as a

place of miracles ...”(Jeremias 118:1989).

The other textual variation is about the name of the pool where the healing took place. There is strong attestation for “Βηθσαιδα” (Morris 1986:166), but most scholars believe this may be confusion about the town by the same name on the Sea of Galilee. “Bethsaida can (although it appears in p^{66.75}) be ruled out as an adaptation to the well-known place” (Schnackenburg 1982:94). Βηθεσδα is also widely supported, because the name means “House of [Divine] Mercy” (Metzger 1975:208). This may be an attempt to link the name with the miracle by means of a “pious interpretation” (Schnackenburg 1982:94).

Least likely is the rendering Βηθζαθα (Metzger 1975:208) because of its similarity to a northeast quarter by that name near the temple in Jerusalem. There was a rectangular spring-fed pool with five porticoes “discovered in 1888 near St. Anne’s Church” in the Bezetha quarter of Jerusalem. This also is near the Sheep’s Gate and the Tower of Antonio. It features a “five-arched portico with faded frescoes of Christ’s healing” (Unger 1984:426).

Because of recent archaeological discoveries in Qumran it now seems clear that Bethesda (Βηθεσδα) should be our choice for the pool’s name. The pool was about 50 feet deep, with no shallow end. “The pool was trapezoidal in form, 165-220 feet wide by 315 feet long, divided by a central partition” (Brown 1985:207). “A cripple would have had to be carried and held all the time” (Muller 1978:710). The Copper Scroll has a reference to a pool at Betheshdathayim (Metzger 1975:208). The etymology of the name might have been the result of what happened there before John 5.

Verse 4 is not accepted as a part of the original text by most scholars. Verse 4 is rated an {A} by Metzger to indicate the verse should not be included in the accepted text (Metzger 1975:209). Against this view would be Bultmann who argues for its inclusion on the basis of its difficulty. He thought it had been edited out due to the reference about angels. Bultmann says it helps make sense out of verse 7 (Bultmann 1971:241). Adding

to this view would be the use of the Greek word translated “well” or “whole” in verse 4. Against this view, would be the seven non-Johannine words in the verse (Brown 1985:207; Metzger 1975:209). “In the West, Tertullian (ca. A.D. 200) gives evidence of having known this verse; Chrysostom (ca. 400) is the first of the Greek writers to do so” (Brown 1985:207).

The Time of Healing

In John’s gospel it is clear that Jesus does nothing until the timing is correct (Jn. 2:4, 4:53, 5:28, 7:6-8, 8:20, 12:31, etc.). The first matter of timing was that Jesus performs this healing miracle on the Sabbath. This is the first of two Sabbath miracles recorded in John (c.f. John 9:1-14). There are five others in the Gospels (Mk. 1:21-27, 1:29-31, 3:1-6; Lk. 13:10-17, and Lk. 14:1-6). Matthew does not record any of Jesus’ Sabbath healings.

Not the Mosaic Law, but “the ‘tradition of the elders’ distinguished thirty-nine categories of work not to be undertaken on the Sabbath. The thirty-ninth one was the carrying of a load from one dwelling to another” (Bruce 1983:125). This was forbidden in Mishnaic tractate Sabbath 7:2 (Brown 1985:208); thus, it was risky for the invalid to obey Jesus’ commands. If he did it unadvisedly, “he is bound to offer sacrifice for his sin; but if presumptuously, he is punished by cutting off, and being stoned” (Lightfoot 1997:296). When was the man transported to the pool? This miracle takes place on the Sabbath. Who would have retrieved him? Why could not they have helped the man into the pool?

Another aspect of the timing concerns which feast is being referred to in verse 1? There are three or four reasoned suggestions in identifying the feast. Textual evidence suggests a translation of “a feast” as opposed to “the feast” which would indicate Passover. “Of the various readings, those without the article are preferable from the point of view of textual criticism and can be fully justified” (Schnackenburg 1982:93). In

John's Gospel, *every* time Passover is mentioned, a definite article is used.

Bultmann says 5:1 refers to Passover. Even though “no precise description of the feast is given, it can only be the feast of the Passover” (Bultmann 1971:240). This is the result of his rearranging of chapter 6 after chapter 4 to smooth out Jesus' itinerary back and forth between Jerusalem and Galilee. Each chapter need not follow immediately on the heels of the preceding one. John's “some time later” (μετα ταυτα) in 5:1 “is a time note he uses now and then to convey the thought of an indefinite interval” (Morris 1986:164). Bultmann's choice of Passover may be motivated more from his forced rearrangement of the text than anything else. One has to ask why there would be no extant manuscripts with his particular arrangement. “It is only against the christological background of Jesus' self-revelation as the Son that the soteriological discourse about the bread that has come down from heaven, along with Jesus' calling his flesh the true food and his blood the true drink, get their true meaning” (Ridderbos 1997:183).

“Codex Sinaiticus reads “the feast,” which would probably be a reference either to Tabernacles (Bernard) or to Passover (Lagrange); but the evidence for the omission of the article is overwhelming” (Brown 1985:206). Purim has been suggested, but Godet thinks this would have been lost on his Greek audience (Godet 1877:147). Bruce raises the possibility of Tabernacles. He also gives an alternate view that it could be the festival of the Trumpets (A New Year's Day reference). B. F. Westcott, J. Rendel Harris, and more recently Aileen Guilding concurs saying “the judgment theme of the discourse in chapter 5 is characteristic of the lessons for the seasons of Trumpets” (Bruce 1983:121). Aside from a historical and religious backdrop for the miracle, the important issue is this healing took place on a Sabbath.

Circumstances of Man Who Was Healed

The man had been an invalid thirty-eight years. When Jesus was born this man was already afflicted. The man's condition was described by ξηρων in verse 3. This

word may mean “disabled with atrophied limbs” (Rienecker 1980:229), “withered, paralyzed” (BAG 1979:548). Being in this condition for thirty-eight years certainly would have made this man one of the most hopeless cases (Tenney 1981:62).

The man was likely poor, yet Jeremias goes beyond the text by suggesting the man engaged Jesus initially asking for alms (Jeremias 1989:118). Jeremias may be trying to bring Acts 3 back to mind because of the known request for alms there. A hint to the man’s poverty *is* found in the word for his mat (κραββατος) which was associated with the poor (Brown 1985:207). The bed was possibly made of straw (Bruce 1983:124).

The invalid was totally unaware of who Jesus was or what He really could do for him, otherwise, he would not have wanted help into the water. He must have been very frustrated after all his years of suffering.

The language shows that Jesus knew about this man when he saw him, and that the invalid had been in this condition for years. In verse 6, εχει, which is a durative present, indicates “something has been and still is” (Brooks and Winbery 1979:77). So in verse 7 the frustration intensified where people, probably with chapped lips (Craddock 1982:43) get into the pool first. It was not those in the worst condition who were able to enter the water first. The invalid’s complaint was that “someone else goes down (προ) “before me” (KJV) or “ahead of me” (NIV). A “pictorial present” or “descriptive present” is used for καταβαινει and ερχομαι to describe something which is now taking place, i.e. in the process of occurring (Dana and Mantey 1957:182). The man had never been swift enough to get into the water first. Others passed him on the steps.

2. THE REASON FOR THIS MIRACLE

A Study in “Weakness” and “Wholeness”

Two words in our pericope are antithetical. One is the condition this invalid had *before* Jesus. He was weak or sick (ασθενης). The other was the state the man experienced *after* his encounter with Jesus. He was well or whole (υγιης). The man may have had nothing to do with his initial plight although Jesus did tell him to “stop sinning” (5:14). Just like the blind man in John 9 it was not because of sin that he was this way. His healing was to bring glory to God. Because John almost always talks on two levels, we should interpret this weakness and wholeness to be more than just physical.

Ασθενης sometimes means to stumble or to be weak. In Hebrews 4:15 it may carry the load of “sin”. James 5:13ff. uses a form of ασθενης when the sick are mentioned. This James’ passage is in the context of forgiveness. One must wonder if James also has a double meaning (spiritual and physical) in mind.

‘Υγιης has meant healthy since the 5th century B.C.E. In the Hellenistic world we see “there is ref. to the sickness and health of the soul as well as the body” (Luck 1972:310). Also “in the magic pap. ‘υγιεια can be set alongside ζωη and σωτηρια and have the sense of ‘wholeness’”(Luck 1972:310). In the Septuagint health is connected to life and viewed as a divine gift (Luck 1972:310). “That the presence of vitality is to be attributed to a creative act of the Deity is a common oriental conception” (Rad 1964:844). In the New Testament, at the very words of Jesus, health is restored and sin is forgiven. “In the healings of Jesus σωζω never refers to a single member of the body but always to the whole man” (Foerster 1971:990). Jesus’ life-purpose was to offer salvation (5:34).

Ἰγης is what God wants for mankind. It is also critical to John 5:1-15. The word is used twelve times in the New Testament, and six times in this passage (counting v. 4). “Wholeness” is what Jesus offered the invalid.

The Miracle Was Intended to Be a Sign

In John, miracles have a focused purpose (John 20:30-31). They are to cause belief in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God. It is through believing in Jesus that real life is established. This is the third miraculous sign in John.

Jesus makes a point as to who is Lord of the Sabbath and how his work is to glorify God. “Where Jesus takes the initiative with healing someone, curiously this happens on the Sabbath frequently ...” (Beasley-Murray 1987:71). He was literally setting into motion his own execution (John 5:16-18). Jesus was correcting a human defect (lameness?), but he was still more interested in the man’s spiritual life (verse 14). His question in verse 6: “Do you want to get well?” was more about the invalid’s relationship with Jesus (God) than a physical healing although it seems both happened. Another key word in this section is “rise” (εγείρε). “The word ‘rise’ is going to play a very essential role in what follows (cf. vs. 21). The entire focus is on the manifestation of Jesus’ glory” (Ridderbos 1997:186).

I believe that Jesus tested the invalid’s will to get well. “He does that by asking him the question in verse 6: “Do you want to get well?” Godet makes the distinction between Βουλει and Θελεις (Godet 1877:155). “The first essential towards receiving the power of Jesus is the intense desire for it” (Barclay 1956:175). Morris argues that the man might have been afraid to give up the familiar. “He would be adventuring into an unknown life” (Morris 1986:168). One has to ask, though, why the invalid would complain (verse 7) if he did not wish to become well? Why was he at the pool at all? I cannot see Jesus healing the invalid against his will. It may be, too, that the question to the invalid “is included to prepare the way for the miraculous healing (verse 9) and make

it clear that this was brought about by Jesus” (Schnackenburg 1982:95). Against this idea, might be verse 13.

Bultmann says that Jesus is not trying to strengthen the will of this man (Bultmann 1971:242). He is going to heal him, and it will be immediate (εὐθὺς). Jesus is the only requirement for healing here. Some healings are a result of faith; others may birth belief in God. All of it is by God’s grace.

Grounds for any sacramental interpretation of this passage, seeing a baptismal motif, seems ill-advised because certainly the man never made it into the water. He did not need to. “Certainly some of this symbolism is possible, however, it is extremely difficult to determine that it was intended by the evangelist and is not simply eisegesis” (Brown 1985:211).

When Jesus commands a man to do something, he expects him to respond. He never would ask man what was not possible to do (with his help). And when man obeys, even when Jesus obeys, it always makes God look good. “Precisely because Jesus renounces his own willfulness in its entirety and exists only for the Father is there due him the ‘glory’ (δοξά) of the sovereign who sent him” (Haenchen 1984:259).

The intention of the miraculous sign was to show Jesus for who he was. Jesus’ revelation is that he is Life-Giver and Judge. The Word had created life “in the beginning” (John 1:1-4). At the word of Jesus, life was given to a paralytic and will be again to others who will truly hear (5:8, 24-25). Jesus will call the dead to life again (5:28-29). Wherever Truth is offered there will always be those who reject the gift. “The fourth gospel, however, acknowledges the provocative function of revelation in these conflicts for all those who are caught up in a purely human way of thinking (cf. 5:44)” (Schnackenburg 1982:97).

CONCLUSION

“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him” (John 1:10). We have been given testimony (John 1:15; 5:33, 36, 45-46). We have had the benefit of the law through Moses (1:17) and the Scriptures (5:39), yet still there is the possibility of death (5:40).

The festivals are fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is Lord over the Sabbath. There is no rest for God, and there can be no rest for the Son (5:17). Jesus called God his Father, like only he could, “making himself equal with God (5:18).” Much of what we have in historical details in John 5 tends to blend into the background, and so it is, that allegorizing this story only helps us to look back into the past. Jesus is *here* now and actively obeying God in the present. Jesus provides a behavioral model for us (5:19, 30).

Jesus does and says exactly what God does and says (5:19). Jesus offers life just like his Father (5:21, 24, 26). Jesus sometimes heals physically (5:9a), and he offers spiritual life “to whom he is pleased to give it” (5:21b). “Jesus takes the initiative and finds the man in the Temple” (Moloney 1996:6; Brown 1985:209) and warns him not to continue sinning or “something worse may happen (5:14).” Physical wholeness is one thing, but spiritual wholeness, *real* life, requires faith in Jesus (5:24). Jesus is given the responsibility as the Son of Man (5:22, 27) to execute judgment on those who refuse to believe (5:24-25).

Jesus, the “life-giver” and judge offers life, but that offer is contingent upon whether we accept or reject God as revealed in his Son, Jesus of Nazareth. This choice to believe will affect our present and future life. Resurrection is both now and coming for everyone. Jesus says rise, get up (5:8). Faith separates those who receive life from those who will be condemned. Faith is a life and death decision.

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Jesus Offers Life

John 5:1-15

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John reports miracles sparingly. This is unlike Mark whose volume of miracles is nearly fifty per cent of the text. Yet when John recounts a miracle, many times it is connected with a discourse or an “ego eimi” saying to drive home the theological point. For instance, to support the claim “I am the light of the world” (8:12), Jesus heals a blind man (John 9). In John 11 Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead after claiming “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25). John 5 is no different. Jesus heals a paralytic and shows that He is Life-Giver and Judge, thus equal with God (5:21-23).

It might be interesting to do a study as to why a preacher selects one passage over another when choosing his next sermon. Sometimes I think the text or story may actually pick its own speaker. Certain narratives resonate with us because there is a common experience being portrayed. John 5:1-15 has a story of a man who was healed after having been an invalid for thirty-eight years. He was not healed because of faith, in fact; the invalid did not even know Jesus. The story is unique to John even though there may have been other miracles like it which are not recorded (John 20:30).

I was almost thirty-eight years old when one day in church I am sure I heard Jesus say to me: “Do you want to get well?” I had been crippled by the idea that a successful career would give me and my family what we wished. I was blind to what was really needed. I thought if I got the big promotion to Corporate in Denver and another big raise I’d be on my way. Don’t misunderstand, but even though I was in church I did not expect to encounter Jesus. While sitting in my pew He basically said to me: “get up; get your life in order. I need you to be my witness.

Jesus performed signs and wonders in John’s gospel to help create the possibility of a new life. To live this new life requires faith in Jesus as God’s Son. Jesus offers life to those He chooses. He does this to encourage faith. A new life becomes a possibility for this paralytic in John 5, but there were wrong ideas that needed corrected.

Jesus confronted the invalid’s idea of wholeness. The first thing Jesus did was ask him if he wished to get well. The paralytic must have wanted a better life, but he just saw the physical. This is a very important principle here. The word for wholeness (“ὑγιης**”) is used twelve**

times in the NT, and six times in our passage if you include verse four. It seems that Jesus is certainly trying to teach a lesson on holistic health. Jesus wanted the man to understand there was more to life than physical wellness.

At this point Jesus listened to the invalid's plan to get well. His scheme depended on a number of resources coming together at the right time. The man needed an aide, someone to put him in the water. From recent archaeological discoveries in Qumran the pool called Bethesda had no shallow end, but may have been consistently about fifty feet deep.

Secondly, this paralytic had to get in at just the right time when the water was stirred or troubled. Even though verse four is found in the KJV translation where it says,

For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water; whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had."

This was certainly information available to the invalid. It is very doubtful though that verse four was ever a part of the original text.

Lastly, a person had to be first into the water according to the myth to be healed. You can almost see the other infirmed people passing him on the steps leading down to the pool. These would be people less afflicted with conditions like "chapped lips" or "hang nails." This was a cruel system indeed that rewarded the least needy. It's a little like a billionaire winning the lottery. There is something inherently unfair.

All these things, coupled with the duration of the man's illness, left him with little hope. Nevertheless, if *his* healing was ever going to occur, he knew how it had to happen.

Years ago, I thought I had everything all figured out as to how my career and life were going to turn out, that was until I met Jesus at church that one Sunday in April. I had not even thought about *Jesus* helping me. I had not expected him to be there in service at all. I had always thought that with the help of others and my own efforts I could

accomplish all my goals.

In our story, Jesus literally ignored the man's misguided request for help and went directly to the task of healing him. He commanded this man with atrophied limbs to "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." The healing was instantaneous. With one word, Jesus cured this man who was thinking that this would be a day like so many before. He would not go home disappointed today. The One who had called the *kosmos* into place with His word certainly was not challenged by this small feat. Jesus healed him though, not to show off, but to demonstrate he was the Son of God. Jesus was demonstrating the same power over life and death as the Father (v.21).

I am sure there have been times when we have been approached by God and asked to do what was beyond our plan or imagination. I like what Watchman Nee said, "God will never ask you to do what *you* can do." One thing is clear though from this narrative. We must obey God's command if we are to have any chance for life. It is by His grace we were selected and asked to respond.

There was another corrective measure Jesus had to take. Jesus challenged the Jewish idea of religion. The word *feast* is used seventeen times in John's gospel. Matthew and Mark use it only twice, while Luke has *feast* only three times. Leon Morris must be correct when he tells us that apparently one of John's minor aims is to show his readers that Jesus perfectly fulfilled all that the feasts typified. What they symbolized he brought into existence.

The Jews, as John calls them, are usually at odds with Jesus in this gospel. They wanted everybody to work within the rules they had for healings, even God. They wanted to make sure that good was done on the right day in the right way.

Jesus was fully aware that it was the Sabbath. He knew he would be forcing a discussion of what was appropriate activity on the Sabbath. Jesus also understood that this conflict would effectively cause his persecution (v.16) and "timely" death.

F. J. Moloney tells us that once we get to verse 9b, the Sabbath

theme dominates the account of the miracle and its aftermath. Even though most of the discussion about the Sabbath controversy is found in the verses after our text, everyone knew the consequences of breaking the Sabbath.

Not the Mosaic Law, but the ‘tradition of the elders’ distinguished thirty-nine categories of work not to be undertaken on the Sabbath. The thirty-ninth one was the carrying of a load from one dwelling to another. It would have been risky for the invalid to obey Jesus’ command to pick up his mat and walk. If he had broken this law unknowingly, the man Jesus healed would have been bound to offer a sacrifice for his sin, but if with full knowledge he had broken the Sabbath law; he could have been punished by being stoned.

In verse twenty-one Jesus insisted that he is only doing what God would do: giving life to the dead. And then in verse twenty-four Jesus further insisted that this life is received by hearing his words and believing. God did not discontinue his creative activity after the first week of recorded human history. God is still creating life on Saturdays, and his son, Jesus, will only do what he sees his father doing.

Man-made laws, no matter how well-intentioned, can not place limits on God. Part of the Jews’ problems here was that they had tried to put God into a box. They had tried to confine him to their system of regulated truth. They had no imagination that God could be walking among them. They had no idea that Jesus could also heal them and make *them* whole.

The man who wanted to be healed felt that his help would come from a place, the pool. Little did he know that it would be a person who would heal him. God had been freed from the confines of the man-made temple. Jesus was among men showing himself to everyone who had eyes to see. God had become less predictable about who he would associate with and who he might heal. With the coming of Jesus grace is now impossible to calculate or anticipate.

Today, we may try to limit God so that he can only work within certain religious affiliations. We need to be careful that we don’t find ourselves working against God. Arrogance about one’s perceived relationship with God is not just a first-century problem.

We need to be careful that we do not oppose God because of our

limited imagination or knowledge. Life is not found in law and regulation. Only death and disappointment are found there. Even a diligent study of the Scriptures does not guarantee possession of eternal life (5:39). Only God can help us find life.

Jesus offers the gift of life “to whom he is pleased to give it.” This may be one of the more difficult principles to understand. It is his sovereignty that allowed Jesus to select this man from all the “great number of disabled people” who were used to lying about the pool hoping for it to be their day to be made whole.

I personally believe that God still heals people miraculously today. Out of that kind of faith there is still the natural and very human question that comes: “why that person, or why not me?” It seems to me God must have his reasons.

I knew a woman in Midland, Michigan by the name of Rosemary. Everybody called her “Buzzy.” Apparently she made bee-like sounds when she was a baby and the nickname stuck. When she was in her late teens she was in an automobile accident that made her a paraplegic. At about forty I was blessed to baptize her into Christ, and He gave her a new life. She told me once, I’ll never forget what she said, “the best day of my life was when I went into this wheelchair.” How could she say such a thing? It was because she realized that there are worse things that can happen to a person.

If I were God I might try to protect my children from any harm or adversity. God did not help the Apostle Paul by taking away his “thorn in the flesh.” Actually the affliction helped Paul to stay humble and made him a better witness for God.

In verse fourteen of our text there are two items of interest. One aspect of Jesus’ character is that he continues to watch out for those he has healed. He does not leave us alone. Verse fourteen indicates that Jesus “found” the man which tells me Jesus cares what happens to all of us. This is made more clear by the precise command to “stop sinning.” Jesus wants us to understand that with a gift like life comes the responsibility to live for God. We must be careful to make right choices and follow His commands. Following His commands becomes the same as following Him.

We were all sick once, unable to help ourselves, and then Jesus

met us, maybe even unexpectedly, and offered us life. Sometimes it is easy to go through life handicapped, not recognizing God when He is right there. We may not even hear His clear and distinct voice over the din of the world.

But, there is good news. Jesus, the “life-giver” and judge offers life, however, this offer is still contingent upon whether we accept or reject God as revealed in his Son, Jesus of Nazareth. This choice to believe will affect our present and future life. Resurrection is both now and coming for everyone. Jesus says rise, get up (5:8). Faith is the response that segregates those who receive life from those who will be condemned. Faith is a life and death decision.

One has to read past John 3:16 for at least two more verses. Listen to what it says:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

Jesus offers life.

I like what Beasley-Murray says about the man in our story and the potential of the invalid’s healing. It is also true for us:

“An amazing future follows the amazing present.”