

This is a fascinating story because of John's many wonderful details, as well as the archeology and history of this pool. Most of all, it is fascinating because it reveals Jesus to us. <sup>1</sup> *Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews.* This is the only unnamed feast in the Gospel of John. That may be because of the fact that the feast of the Jews was, in that age, synonymous with the Feast of Tabernacles. If the year was 31AD, as many believe, then this would have taken place near the end of October. Crowds would have been gathering in the cooling autumn air to build their booths for this special season of remembering the wilderness wanderings.

<sup>2</sup> *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.* The stone from the wall of the Temple that marked the Sheep Gate has been uncovered and is on display near where it was found. (Nehemiah 3:1) The Sheep Gate was the place the sacrificial sheep were brought through the city wall into the Temple. Before they were brought in, they would be washed using water from the pool.

This pool is only mentioned here in John and there was no other historical reference. That is bait for skeptics, God's bait. There are those that so hate the Scriptures that they seek out every possible error, discrepancy, or apparent contradiction. Some even make it their life's work to try and discredit the Bible. No other work of literature is so hated and so loved as the Holy Bible, so when skeptics see a unique name, immediately the claim goes out that the name is made up. Papers are written. So called scholars come to a consensus that this is one more reason we don't need to see the Bible as divinely inspired, in other words, so we can live just as selfishly as we please. I don't want to sound bitter, but when the Bible is more verifiably accurate in details to a greater extent than any other ancient work and yet CNN, the History Channel, and others continually tell the public that the Bible is a collection of myths, it looks to me like an intentional distortion by those who claim to be purveyors of factual information.

Then the Qumran caves were searched and the Copper Scroll was discovered. The Copper Scroll mentioned the pools of Bethesda. Oops. In the 1960s, priests that own the property began to search in earnest for the pools. Where else would they start but right where John said the pools were, by the Sheep Gate. Sure enough, underneath the rubble of centuries of occupiers was a double pool that had five colonnades, exactly as John described. The reason that there were five colonnades is that one colonnade divided the two pools. Then the skeptics bowed their head and repented – we wish. No, actually they moved on to something else, which we'll talk about in another sermon. (2Timothy 3:7)

<sup>3</sup> *Here a great number of disabled people used to lie--the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.* What's going on here? In some later manuscripts, verse 4 said an angel would come stir the water and the first one in was healed. This type of building around a pool was common in the Greek worship of the false god of healing, Asclepius. In fact, after the destruction of the area such a temple was built over the spot probably because of this tradition. I doubt the Jewish religious leaders approved of what was happening there, but they probably couldn't stop those desperate for healing from gathering. There could have been hundreds of hopeless cases around that pool. Imagine the sight you would see. The feverish would be under the colonnades seeking shade. The paralyzed would be

**Commented [notes1]:** 1 Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel. Neh 3:1 (NIV)

**Commented [notes2]:** 7 always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth. 2 Tim 3:7 (NIV)

near the edge hoping for help. The blind would be listening as intently as they could just hoping their turn had come. It was the sorriest crowd you could ever see. The site would be as heartbreaking as the stench was nauseating.

Why did they come? Did an angel really stir the water? It sounds like, and most probably was, a superstition that started with one person believing they were healed when the water moved. Then the crowds began to come. It's that way at Lourdes and other places around the world even in our day. The tale grows as someone's illness seems to get better and adds to the story. The wind or underground springs would stir the water and the first in are the healthiest who are most likely to be healed by their body's own natural immune processes. It is an evil hoax, because it gave the desperate a false sense of hope. (Psalm 130:7)

<sup>5</sup> *One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.* We don't really know what had disabled him. It is thought that he was probably paralyzed. We also don't know how long he had been at the pool hoping for a miracle. It may have been that entire time. The average male life expectancy was around 40. He had been disabled almost as long as most men lived.

It sounds like Jesus had come alone. Without the disciples around Him, He could go incognito with His prayer shawl hiding his face, observing situations without being mobbed by those desperate for healing. Jesus came to see this broken mass of humanity that He had come to save. (Luke 19:10) Have you ever asked yourself why He picked out this one man? Why didn't He heal everyone like He did in other places? (Matthew 4:24) Surely He wanted to heal them all.

Jesus could have been so overwhelmed with healing that His real ministry of healing our souls would have taken a back seat. Jesus picked and chose His moments at the direction of the Holy Spirit, which the following text points out. Those who think that everyone should be miraculously healed need to consider this passage.

Jesus was at this place that others in good health avoided or even shunned. Why did He go there? Next to the site of the Pools of Bethesda is a church built by the Crusaders in the 12<sup>th</sup> century called Saint Anne's. Tourists all stop there to sing, as the acoustics are some of the best in the world. It makes an ordinary group sound like a trained choir three times their size. It is one place that joins Christians from all over the world as they come together to sing the songs of faith. It always makes me think of what singing in heaven will be like as we join our hearts with those of other nations and tongues in worship. The church is named after the mother of Mary, Anne (Hannah). Tradition says that this is where Mary's parents lived, only about 50 yards from the pools.

Jesus certainly visited his grandparents on trips to the feasts in Jerusalem. Did He go over to look at the pools? Did He help His grandfather wash a lamb to present in the Temple and in doing so see this invalid year after year? Did He wonder year after year when His ministry would begin and if at that time He would heal him?

<sup>6</sup> *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?"* Do you see the word "learned"? Many translations prefer the translation "knew" instead. In other words, Jesus knew he

**Commented [notes3]:** 7 O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.  
Psalms 130:7 (NIV)

**Commented [notes4]:** 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."  
Luke 19:10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes5]:** 24 News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.  
Matt 4:24 (NIV)

had been there a long time. It could be that as Jesus grew up He had seen the man every year.

Indulge me a little in painting a scenario that is imagination based on the wording of the text and the possibility that the site really is Jesus' grandparents' home. Perhaps the boy Jesus saw that man. Their eyes met, and He could see the pain there. Maybe Jesus asked His grandfather about the man and his grandfather told Jesus to pray for him. The next year Jesus may have looked to see if he was still there or if he had been healed. Every year the man was still there. Jesus may have wondered if the Holy Spirit would direct Him to heal that man once His ministry began.

This was Jesus' second trip to Jerusalem during His three years of ministry. The disciples may have been busy planning their booth for the Feast while Jesus wandered away. Heading straight for the pools, He left the disciples to wonder where He had gone. Covering His head with His prayer shawl and slipping into the colonnaded area He prayed, "Now, Father? Would You heal the man now?" The reply that He longed to hear came, "Yes, Son. Now!"

Without any introduction, Jesus looked into his eyes and asked, "Do you want to get well?" What kind of a question is that? Not everyone wants to get well. Some people find the attention they derive from their illness is more desirable than no attention at all. Some are so used to their illness they would be afraid to try to find work and live a different life. Some have developed relationships with people based on the need to be needed. To some, the wound in their heart is like a constant companion that they cannot leave. Jesus doesn't force wholeness on anyone, physical or spiritual. Whatever your illness is, let the Holy Spirit ask you, "Do you want to get well?" (Luke 18:41) Is there a refusal to forgive in your life? Do you want to get well? Is your relationship with your spouse stagnant because neither of you will change? Do you want to get well? Have you given up on God because He didn't answer that prayer the way you wanted? There is healing for you, if you want to get well.

<sup>7</sup> "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." The man had placed His faith in the legend of the angel stirring the water. His desperation had driven away family and friends or he had out lived them. He was hoping Jesus would volunteer to help him get in the water the next time it was stirred. It was hope in the wrong thing. (Psalm 72:12) The stirring water would never heal him even if he were to be in first. How ironic to ask the Lord of angels to help you get an angel's cure!

How many people are exactly where this man was? They are waiting by some other famous site or false hope. We live at one of the most acclaimed Bethesdas in the world today. Have you ever met one person that a vortex verifiably healed? They make pilgrimages to meditate on the vortexes, and go away just like they came. Their broken hearts are still broken, and their bodies are still ill. When tourists ask me about the vortexes, my response is that if they healed people, don't you think there would be a line a mile long as the desperately ill and incurable waited their turn? But people are desperate. What would Jesus say to them? (Exodus 15:26)

<sup>8</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." He didn't explain the man's error, or misplaced faith. He just spoke the word and walked away. If He didn't

**Commented [notes6]:** 41 "What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord, I want to see," he replied. Luke 18:41 (NIV)

**Commented [notes7]:** 12 For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. Psalms 72:12 (NIV)

**Commented [notes8]:** 26 He said, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you." Ex 15:26 (NIV)

leave at that moment, desperate people would have swamped Him. (Luke 5:19) I think He did what He had waited for years to do at the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Try to picture it. The man's legs suddenly fatten up. A surge of energy runs through him as nerves and sinews suddenly strengthen and bones become denser. He leaps to his feet and starts shouting. "I'm healed! I'm healed! Look! 38 years and suddenly I can walk. The man just said, 'Get up!' Now I can walk!" And then see all the astonished faces of those who had lain around the pool that knew his prior condition.

Bethesda is translated into English as the House of Kindness or House of Pouring. It was first built by Herod the Great, but later replaced by a pool closer to the Sheep Gate specifically for washing sheep. Jesus had come to demonstrate the kindness of the heart of the Father, a heart that was the same as His own. (Isaiah 61:1-3a) Just as people drew water from the pool and poured it over their sacrificial sheep, Jesus poured the healing, cleansing water of His word over the invalid.

<sup>9</sup>At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath,<sup>10</sup> and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." The Father often had Jesus heal on the Sabbath to drive home a point. The Sabbath is not about enforcing rules. It's about worship and rest. (Mark 2:27) The religious leaders had dozens of laws to interpret resting on the Sabbath. The specific rabbinical law the man was breaking was moving household items from one place to another. What were his options? He could have stayed there until the Sabbath was over, but after being there for so long, I'm sure he was ready to go. He could have left the mat, but it surely would have been acquired by some other desperate soul. Jesus had to solve the man's dilemma by telling him to take it in spite of religion's rules. The healed man's defense was that the man that healed him told him to take it. (John 9:16)

What is amazing to me is that these religious leaders are so into their legalism that they can't rejoice that this man has been miraculously healed after 38 years! They are just eager to find the man that incited the invalid to "sin". God save us from the spirit of legalism! It drives more seekers away from church than anything else (except perhaps one's own desire to cling to real sin). Can we embrace the alcoholic, the adulterer, or the one who comes from another religious perspective and let the Holy Spirit bring conviction in His time? Jesus will address the man's sin, but not until he was healed. You can catch the fish, but leave the cleaning to God. He may use you, but please let the Holy Spirit lead, not a spirit of self-righteousness. Love never fails! (1Corinthians 13:8)

The Temple was very close by, and the man apparently went into the Temple to thank the Lord for His healing. He met Jesus there. <sup>14</sup>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." There was a belief in that time that all sickness or tragedy was the judgment of God on a sinful life. Jesus repudiated that idea when He healed the man that was born blind. When the disciples asked who had sinned, the man or his parents, Jesus said, "Neither. It happened that the glory of God might be manifest." (John 9:3) Yet here, Jesus seems to imply that illness can be the result of sin, unless the worse thing He referred to is eternal judgment. Perhaps Jesus was warning him to seek spiritual wholeness now that his body was healed.

**Commented [notes9]:** 19 When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. Luke 5:19 (NIV)

**Commented [notes10]:** The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, 3a and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. Isaiah 61:1-3 (NIV)

**Commented [notes11]:** 27 Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Mark 2:27 (NIV)

**Commented [notes12]:** 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided. John 9:16 (NIV)

**Commented [notes13]:** 8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 1 Cor 13:8 (NIV)

**Commented [notes14]:** 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. John 9:3 (NIV)

Biologists tell us that we are devolving at a rate much higher than scientists expected. Increasing illness isn't all a result of pollution but of an increasingly weakened gene pool. Mutations over the ages have been compounding and continue to until one day in the not so distant future, mankind will not be able to survive. We live in a fallen world that is decaying. (Romans 8:21) Part of that decay is increasing kinds of illnesses and the frequency of disease or weaknesses occurring. The good news is Jesus still heals. It isn't always His will or time, as it wasn't His will to stay there and heal everyone at the pools, but He can and does heal bodies, hearts, and minds. (James 5:14-15)

<sup>15</sup> *The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Did he just not understand the antagonism of the religious leaders toward Jesus? Or was he trying to persuade the Jews to believe? Or was it just an issue of defending himself? (John 9:11) I can't help but think that he sincerely thought that it would be helpful for the Jewish leadership to realize Jesus was God's servant. That was misguided, as we often are. Try to point out an error to a religious leader by showing them a Scripture and only the humble leader will consider it. Jesus said, "If they persecute me, they will persecute you too." (John 15:20)*

<sup>16</sup> *So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. They ignored the miraculous display of the mercy of God on the invalid's life, and the wonderful truth that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. And of course it was impossible for them to see that the Father Himself manifest in Jesus is the House of Kindness, the House of Pouring to cleanse us and make us a living sacrifice like the sheep that were cleansed with the water of that pool. (Acts 2:28) All they could see was that someone broke their precious rules. That is what happens to us when legalism becomes our focus. When we are legalistic we feel we have to stop the one that is encouraging others to be led of the Spirit and not the law. The legalistic feel threatened by freedom and genuine love. It exposes legalism for what it really is. (2Corinthians 3:6)*

Let me close with a testimony from the House of Kindness. The last time we were there in Israel, the Lord led us to pray for a person on the tour. We stopped there where the invalid was healed and asked the House of Kindness, the Lord Jesus, to pour out that kindness over her marriage and upon her injured back. We prayed there, not because the place was special, but because the place reminded us of the One who is able.

I don't hear the Spirit as clearly as our Lord did. I wasn't sure it was God's time to heal her, but we asked in faith and left it in His hands. On the way back we met at the Atlanta airport. The woman we prayed for came running up with a big smile, "My back doesn't hurt!" Her marriage was restored as well. You see, the House of Kindness is still here. It isn't a location or a holy spot; it's where He is. You don't need an angel. You need the Lord of the angels. (Psalm 24:10) Jesus has been longing to bring you healing and seen your condition year after year. He's waiting for your heart to be prepared to receive it. Sometimes we have to exhaust all other hopes until there is no one else to help us. It is then that we hear Jesus say, "Do you want to get well?" (Malachi 4:2)

**Commented [notes15]:** 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. Romans 8:21 (NIV)

**Commented [notes16]:** 14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. James 5:14-15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes17]:** 11 He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." John 9:11 (NIV)

**Commented [notes18]:** 20 Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.

**Commented [notes19]:** 18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. John 15:20 (NIV) Acts 2:18 (NIV)

**Commented [notes20]:** 6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2 Cor 3:6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes21]:** 10 Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty-- he is the King of glory. Selah Psalms 24:10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes22]:** 2 But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. Mal 4:2 (NIV)