

The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels

LESSON XXXIII : THE HEALING OF THE LAME MAN AT THE FEAST - PART I

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	related passages
			5:1-47	

Lesson Overview

○ This lesson covers the first part of the chapter, verses 1-18. Jesus attends a feast in Jerusalem at which time He heals a man at the pool of Bethesda. Being a special holiday Sabbath, the healed man is confronted by the Jewish leaders for carrying his bedding. Later upon learning that it was Jesus that healed him, the leaders accuse Christ of Sabbath-breaking. During His response, Jesus claims equality with God which further aroused the Jews.

v1 After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. : exactly when this was cannot be determined from the statement “after this”. In Jn 19:38 the same phrase is used but there cannot be a long time. According to Hendriksen, it is different than “after this” which occurs 2:12; 11:7,11; 19:28 and implies a short duration of time. Following John’s gospel therefore we cannot determine how long after the events of Jn 4 (Samaritan at the well, return into Galilee) took place. “[John] is not telling us everything that happened nor does he let us know how long an interval elapsed before the next incident took place. He is interested in the things Jesus said and did, not in the precise sequence.” [Morris, *John*]

“feast” : this cannot be used to determine the exact time either since there is differences between what feast this refers. Suggested feasts include: Purim in March, Passover in April, Pentecost in May, Feast of Tabernacles in October, Feast of Dedication in December. Good commentators differ on this so it is not a question of orthodoxy but opinion. The “importance” of this feast is in determining the length of the Lord’s earthly ministry, the typical dating of which hinges on the number of Passovers in the gospels. As for the term “feast of the Jews”, it is used by John for both the Passover (6:4) and the feast of Tabernacles (7:2) so the term itself is not decisive either.

- If this is not the passover, the Lord’s ministry could be as short as 2.5 years; if this was a passover, it had to be at least 3.5 years long which is accepted among our circles.
- Purim was not a pilgrim feast but celebrated in local synagogues when Esther is read. Dods [*Gk NT*] states the choices lie between the Passover and Purim.
- it is held traditionally at least as far back as Ireneus to have been the passover, but this must be balanced with the fact that some ancient Greek manuscripts add the word “of Tabernacles”, and Clarke mentions other ancients as holding to Purim and Pentecost.
- Jewish men were required to attend three feasts in Jerusalem: the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles, although the times and customs had reduced that number to one.

Since the Lord does not place importance on this, neither should we although my personal preference is that this feast is the Lord’s second Passover. “The other evangelists speak very sparingly of our Lord’s acts in Judea. They mention nothing of the Passovers, from our Lord’s baptism till his death, excepting the very last: but John points at them all. The first he speaks of, John 2:13; the third, John 6:4; the fourth, John 13:1; and the second in this place: for although he does not call it the passover, but a feast in general, yet the circumstances agree best with this feast; and our Lord’s words, John 4:35, seem to cast light on this subject.” [Clarke, *Commentary*] “If the feast of 5:1 was not a Passover, it is quite impossible to determine what other feast it was. While one would be glad to settle these questions, if it were possible, yet it really does not matter as regards understanding our Lord’s recorded history and teachings during the great ministry in Galilee.” [Robertson, *Harmony*]

“Jesus went up” : nothing is said of any disciples and therefore some place this at the Tabernacles prior to His calling His disciples. But their not being mentioned does not necessarily mean they were not present. If they were not present, then how this story became recorded must be explained.

v2 Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. : Hendriksen says modern scholars are satisfied that they have discovered the location, with archaeologists having discovered the reservoir in 1888 in N.E. Jerusalem. There is a faded fresco (a painting on plaster walls done prior to the plaster drying so the painting becomes a permanent part of the wall) picturing an angel “troubling” the waters. Morris also mentions an archeological discovery of a double pool known in modern times as St. Anne’s. There were five colonnades, one between the two pools and the other four around the perimeter. [Morris, *John*] “What an attitude for a sinner, ever to wait at mercy’s gate! Just before Jesus came he might have said, ‘I’ll return and die at home.’ But he waited a little longer, and his perseverance was crowned with a glorious blessing.” [Doren, *John*]

Some use this verse as a proof-text for an early dating of the gospel of John’s writing since the author says the pool “is” (present

tense) at Jerusalem, implying the author would have had to write prior to 70AD when Jerusalem was destroyed. There are several manners in which this may be explained however. “John wrote AD 96, first year of the Emperor Nerva. “There is” : this gospel was written after the ruin of the city, and that pool is there to this day. Pools were sunk so deep and built so strong, conquerors had not time to destroy them.” [Doren, *John*] “Though there can be little doubt that Jerusalem was destroyed many years before John wrote, yet this does not necessarily imply that the pool and its porticoes must have been destroyed too. It, or something in its place, is shown to travelers to the present day.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

sheep market: the word “market” is added by translators. “The word is an adjective *pertaining to sheep* which requires to be completed with another word, not with *market* but with *gate*. This gate was near the temple on the east of the city. See Neh 3:1,32; 12:39. Some editors join the adjective with the following *pool* ... and reading *the sheep-pool*. Wycliffe: *a standing water of beasts*. [Vincent, *Word Studies*] Edersheim believes it to be a pool enclosed within five porches by the sheep-market, “presumably close to the ‘Sheep-Gate.’” Hendriksen says the pool was not far from the sheep gate, probably so-called because it was through this gate many sheep were led to be sacrificed at the nearby temple-court. The proximity of the pool to the temple was convenient to those begging alms from the temple visitants.

The pool was called Bethesda, the name of which is open to discussion: the Greek words found in various manuscripts include *Bethesda* (“house of mercy”), *Bethzatha* (“house of the olive-tree”), *Belzetha*, *Bethsaida*, *Bethesda*, *Bezatha*, *Betzetha*, *Belzetha*, *Belzatha*, *Berzeta* or even *Bethsaida*. Edersheim says suggested Hebrew / Aramaic words to explain the Gk rendering include *Beth Chisda* (“House of Mercy”), *Beth Istebha* (“House of Porches”), *Beth Zeytha* (“House of the Olive”), *Beth Zesis* (“House of Bubbling- up”), and *Beth Asyatha* (“House of Healing”). “Called: strictly, *surnamed*, the name having perhaps supplanted some earlier name. [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

Porches: Cloisters, covered porticoes. In the days of Jesus they had built five porticos or covered colonnades where the poor and sick could rest protected from the inclement weather.

v3a In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, : Wuest: *In these there was lying down a multitude of infirm people, of blind people, of crippled people, of those, the members of whose bodies were withered.*” Impotent = *asthenountōn* meaning without strength; halt = *chōlōn* meaning lame, crippled; withered = *xārōn* meaning to dry up, withered, used of both plants and members of the body.

v3b,4 waiting for the moving of the water. 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. : controversial portion of the narrative. These are missing from many of the ancient Greek manuscripts and following that lead, most modern translations omit them. Thoughts:

- **some believe the clause should be omitted since it had been added later as an explanatory note.** “The words [of 5:3b,4] are not part of the original text of St. John, but form a very early note added to explain v7, while the Jewish tradition with regard to the pool was still fresh.” [Wescott, *John*] “There can be no doubt that this is not part of what John wrote; it is quite out of character in the New Testament. Nowhere in Scripture do we have anything like an angel’s coming and doing works of healing on a haphazard basis, with the first of a group of sick people to get into a pool being chosen and all the rest ignored, no matter how needy. It simply does not fit into the Christian way of understanding things. But there is little doubt that many people in Jerusalem believed this, and that was why the sick were there at the pool. They really thought that there was a chance of a cure if they could be first into the pool when the water was stirred.” [Morris, *John*] “The tradition about the ‘troubling of the water’ (which may be true even if the angelic visitant may be of the nature of folk-lore) can receive no rational explanation except by the well-known phenomenon, by no means uncommon in Syria and always considered the work of a supernatural being, of an intermittent spring.” [ISBE, vol 1, article “Bethesda”]

- **some believe the clause is original and a necessary part of the narrative.** “[It is] necessary for the understanding of the narrative; and it is quite in keeping with the Jewish conception of the ministry of angels.” [Dods, *Gk NT*] “Although there is weighty *external* evidence against the genuineness of this verse, the *internal* in its favor is overwhelming. Without it the seventh verse, admitted to be genuine, is meaningless.... Why should not the healing powers of nature appear to the profound spiritual vision of John to be directed by an angel? Had we John’s eyes we should doubtless be aware of many such blessed agencies.” [Doren, *John*] “This clause, with the whole of the fourth verse, is wanting in some MSS. and versions; but I think there is no sufficient evidence against their authenticity. Griesbach seems to be of the same opinion; for though he has marked the whole passage with the notes of doubtfulness, yet he has left it in the text. Some have imagined that the sanative virtue was communicated to the waters by washing in them the entrails of the beasts which were offered in sacrifice; and that the angel meant no more than merely a man sent to stir up from the bottom this corrupt sediment, which, being distributed through the water, the pores of the person who bathed in it were penetrated by this matter, and his disorder repelled! But this is a miserable shift to get rid of the power and goodness of God, built on the merest conjectures, self-contradictory, and every way as unlikely as it is insupportable. It has never yet been satisfactorily proved that the sacrifices were ever washed; and, could even this be proved, who can show that they were washed in the pool of Bethesda? These waters healed a man in a moment of whatsoever disease he had. Now, there is no one cause under heaven that can do this. Had only one kind of disorders been cured here, there might have been some countenance for this deistical conjecture — but this is not the case; and we are obliged to believe the relation just as

it stands, and thus acknowledge the sovereign power and mercy of God, or take the desperate flight of an infidel, and thus get rid of the passage altogether.... *Those who feel little or none of the work of God in their own hearts are not willing to allow that He works in others. Many deny the influences of God's Spirit, merely because they never felt them. This is to make any man's experience the rule by which the whole word of God is to be interpreted; and consequently to leave no more divinity in the Bible than is found in the heart of him who professes to explain it.*" [Clarke, Commentary]

- **the tradition concerning this incident has ancient support, whether the clause is original or not, whether the story is Jewish folklore or scripture.** Tertullian (about 145-220 AD) writes this concerning the passage: "An angel, by his intervention, was wont to stir the pool at Bethesda. They who were complaining of ill health used to watch for him; for whosoever was the first to descend into these waters, after his washing ceased to complain." [Tertullian, *On Baptism* V; quoted in Hendriksen, *John*]

- **whatever occurred here apparently ceased not long after Christ.** Whatever happened here was miraculous, for (a) only the first was healed, (b) every kind of disease was healed, and (c) the healing was instantaneous. Tertullian says "The Jews having age after age rebelled against their God, and become exceedingly corrupt, the angel came no more, after they had rejected the Lord." [Doren, *John*] "*Went down*: meaning *descended*. The word seems to imply that the angel had ceased to descend when John wrote. In the second verse, he spoke of the pool as being still in existence; and in this verse he intimates that the Divine influence ceased from these waters. When it began, we know not; but it is likely that it continued no longer than till the crucifixion of our Lord. Some think that this never took place before nor after this time. Neither Josephus, Philo, nor any of the Jewish authors mention this pool; so that it is very likely that it had not been long celebrated for its healing virtue, and that nothing of it remained when those authors wrote."

[Clarke, Commentary]

- **my personal opinion concerning this and the majority of these manuscript questions: why does it matter?** Testimony: while in a college that held to the teachings of Dean Burgon and the authority of the Textus Receptus (the basis for the KJV and NKJV) a question was asked concerning the controversial 1 John 5:7 trinity verse. Being KJV only, I knew what the professor's response would be and was anxious for the put-down of these modern versions. To my surprise the professor (who was also KJV only) said something like the following: "What happens if the text is not part of the original manuscripts? Is your belief in the trinity destroyed? Does the doctrine of the trinity hinge upon a single verse?" *Wow! — good questions!* Since that time my own understanding has shifted although I must admit the process has taken many years. My understanding includes the following:

- **there are no original manuscripts.** I am not saying this to destroy anyone's faith but to dispel any misconceptions some may have. *There is no single, complete Greek NT in existence which is the original as penned by Paul, Peter, John, etc.*

- **God has providentially passed on His word through many manuscripts,** some almost containing the complete NT and some containing only a portion of perhaps a chapter. This is proof of divine wisdom, for if there were a single authoritative manuscript in existence (a) it would be worshiped and become a golden calf to believers, and (b) it would undoubtedly be in the hands of Rome. Considering their attitude that the scriptures are not for the common people (e.g. the Dark Ages), we would be at their mercy as to what the word of God really says. Doctrines would be in their hands to re-write as the need arises and the truth would have been lost centuries ago.

- **there are "families" of manuscripts** which, while not exactly the same, contain like readings. These families are the Western, the Alexandrian, and the Received or Traditional text family. The Received Text is the basis for our KJV and NKJV while the other manuscripts play an important role in the newer versions, accounting for these textual differences we see. The majority of these newer texts were not discovered until early 1800's and later which again accounts for the newer versions and Greek texts in the mid to late 1800's (RSV, ASV, NASV, etc.).

- **the KJV contains readings which are Alexandrian in nature,** which, believe it or not, was one of the major turning points of my own theology concerning this teaching. The basis for being KJV / NKJV only is that they avoided the readings from manuscripts which were "corrupt" (as I had been taught) and therefore less reliable. But upon my studies I came across this fact and if so, then it is not that the KJV rejected the Alexandrian readings; rather the translators in the 1600's used the manuscripts they had available at the time for comparison *including what I had been taught to have been "corrupt" manuscripts. The difference lies in the fact that they did not have the manuscripts available to them which we have today, not that one was better or worse than the other!* The men who translated the KJV were great men of God (see Gustavus S. Paine's *The Men Behind the King James Version*) and what they did was majestic, but if they were alive today, they may very well be on the boards for these modern translations and approving of the new versions! Now *that's* something to consider!

- **I am not nor ever will be in the position to analyze this controversy in the manner it deserves.** As stated previously I used to be KJV only, not by following any one person's ideals (although I did have a two-year period in which I lived and breathed Pete Ruckman) but rather by receiving input from others: pastors, professors and excellent books on the subject. I have come to the conclusion that to fully analyze this teaching I

would need to be a Greek scholar *par excellence* and have access to some of these manuscripts for my own evaluation. That will never happen. For example, on 1 Jn 5:7 I have material which says the Greek text demands the missing verses be supplied, while I have other material which says the Greek text is confused if the missing verses is added and demands that it be omitted. Both of these statements are given by men knowledgeable in the Greek. Who's correct? I am not nor doubt if I'll ever be in a position where I will know beyond question for my own self which of these contradictory statements are true.

■ **I believe each version faithfully translated has its place without valuing any single version higher than the other.** In spite of the scholars who seem to relish in denouncing the KJV at every opportunity, I still read, study, memorize and enjoy this version and probably always will. But I also make use of other versions. For just plain reading I enjoy the NIV and have a pocket NIV-NT I use at work. Of all the versions, I believe that to be the best for readability. For studying along with my KJV I believe the NASV is one of the most accurate on the market. For Greek studies I use a Greek-English interlinear (based upon Stephen's text of 1550 which was foundational in the KJV), the Textus Receptus Greek Text, Wuest's translation which brings forth the Greek better than any version I've read, and Greek dictionaries and concordances. Not for studying but for getting a birds-eye view of a passage I enjoy reading a paraphrase. (By the way, Kenneth Taylor first translated the Living Bible for his children and not to create a new movement among believers. My wife and I are having our oldest son read the Living Bible NT because he is learning to read and we believe it to be a good starting place. Once finished, that will go away and another version will take its place. A grown believer that never advances beyond a paraphrase misses the meat of the Word of God.)

■ **each version has areas which I believe could be translated differently.** Since we all view things through our own doctrines, there are passages in every version I use which I believe should be translated differently. This is due to the translator's own slant of which I may not agree. *It is impossible to not interject one's own beliefs into a translation of the scriptures.*

■ **both the KJV and the newer translations have places which glorify Christ better than the other.** For example I prefer the newer translation's reading of Luke 2:14 (see lesson 14). Another example which I did not mention in my SS lessons was John 1:18 in which the KJV refers to Jesus as "the only begotten Son" while the newer versions say "the only begotten God". Examples on both sides of the fence may be multiplied but it goes to show neither group is "attacking" the deity of Christ.

■ **the newer versions are easier to read.** The first time I read an NIV I came across passages in which I thought, "*I didn't know that's what it was saying!*" I would pick up my KJV and the readings were the same as I had read for years! I do not consider myself Bible-illiterate neither: at the time I was KJV-only and had read the entire Bible from cover-to-cover a minimum of seven times and the NT a minimum of twenty-five times. While the old KJV English does have its beauty and advantages (e.g. thou = singular), the archaic words does sometime hinder the understanding of a passage (some passages are worse than others).

■ **the newer versions are not attempts to destroy the word of God.** When the NIV first came out it gave the address that a person could write and get a list of the translators. I wrote asking for the list, expecting a group of liberals and Catholics since that was what I had been taught is behind all these new versions. To my surprise the men were all sound, fundamental, godly men. Many I recognized by name only, others I recognized from their credentials. No single denomination was preferred, and the men hailed from a variety of backgrounds, *which is the way a translation should be handled.* ***While there are those out in Christendom who are liberal, deny the inspiration of the scriptures and are at work to destroy the conservative faith, there are others who I believe are whole-heartedly dedicated to God and are honestly evaluating the manuscript differences to obtain the closest we may come to the original writings.*** These men are to be praised and not mocked just because they look beyond the KJV.

■ **there is nothing spiritual or non-spiritual about the version a believer uses.** This works both ways: I know believers who are proud of their open-mindedness and that they are not hung up on the old KJV. Then I know other believers who are just as proud because they stand firm in the truth and will not sway to these newer versions. I quote from the very first lesson I ever gave on the gospels: "*There is nothing magical about the word of God, regardless of the version being used. The key is to understand (the teacher's responsibility) and to receive the word with a submissive, obedient heart (the listener's responsibility).*"

■ **no major doctrine is effected by the difference in manuscripts.** Minor differences may occur as today's text illustrates. But I return to the original question: *what difference does it make if the questionable verse is inserted or omitted?* As stated by Hendriksen, the point of the story is the miracle of Christ and the Sabbath controversy which followed, not the beliefs of the Jews as to the healing power of the pool. The entire argument is secondary and non-important.

v5 And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. : of all those present at the pool, Jesus approaches a single man who had been infirmed 38 years. Of course this is not to imply that he has been at the pool for 38 years.

Infirmity: literally without strength; possibly a stroke or paralysis

v6 When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, He saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? : note the man does not say anything yet Christ approaches him. “But as in the case of the deaf mutes healed by our Lord, He saw their *silent plea*. -- Isa 65:1 I am found of them who sought me not.” [Doren, *John*] This pictures the sovereignty of mercy (Rom 9:15) for how many other sufferers did He see, but passed by? **“How like God! He visited the lowly, those whom the world neglected and despised.”** [Doren, *John*]

How did Jesus know the man had been infirmed a long time? -- either someone informed Him, or the Father made it known to Him, or He was aware of it by virtue of His own divine nature. Some state that the term used implies Jesus learned the information as from a friend or by the man himself [e.g. Dods, *Gk NT*]

There are several possibilities as to why Christ asked the question He did:

- to glorify the miracle by emphasizing the man’s confessed inability to be healed
- to attract his attention and possibly awakening faith, hope and the desire to be healed, as well as making him reflect upon his hopelessness without Christ. “Wilt thou: Not merely, *do you wish*, but *are you in earnest?* Jesus appeals to the energy of his will. Not improbably he had fallen into apathy through his long sickness.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*] “ ‘Art thou here with an *earnest desire* to be made whole?’ Our Lord would bring out clearly and definitely the conscious sense of need. And He would awaken *faith* by giving a presentiment of a cure. He would also attract all eyes and hearts to Himself, the INCARNATE GOD.... The question implies, ‘Hast thou done *all that thou couldst* or sought relief by fervent prayer? Hast thou *courage, confidence, and hope* enough to believe that thou canst ever be cured?’ He must confess his case hopeless as to any aid from the pool.” [Doren, *John*]
- Jesus was questioning as to whether the man really did want to change his circumstances. “A man who had been disabled for so many years had settled into a pattern. He knew what his disability allowed him to do and what it stopped him from doing. Almost certainly he was a beggar, since there was no other way he could get a living.... He would lose all his present securities and, being no longer a beggar, would have to earn his own living. How? He had not been trained to do anything; he had no special skills. People might help a lame person, but who would help an able-bodied man?” [Morris, *John*] My wife and I knew a man who falsely claimed to be blind. We do not doubt he had vision problems, but through the years he became dependent upon government aid and jealously guarded the fact he was “blind”. I do not think this is the reason for Jesus asking but it is an interesting application. Spiritually the same applies. “The first essential towards receiving the power of Jesus is the intense desire for it. Jesus comes to us and says: ‘Do you really want to be changed?’ If in our innermost hearts we are well content to stay as we are there can be no change for us.” [William Barclay, quoted by Morris, *John*] “The desire to be saved is as much of *grace* as the plan of *salvation*. The sin to be removed is the *wilfully chosen state* of all unrenewed minds. Instead of parting with it, all their energies are put forth to *retain it*.... ‘All they,’ says Christ, ‘that hate Me love death.’ (Prov 8:36) The sensual insanely cling to their destroyer, and know not that ‘the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of hell.’ (Prov 9:18)” [Doren, *John*]

v7 The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. : the rule of the pool was “every man for himself” and with this man’s afflictions, he was never fast enough to be the first in the pool. The implication is that the man had some ability to move but not quick enough to reach the water first, and unlike the palsied man with four friends, he had none to help.

It is unlikely that John records every detail of the conversation but at least with what’s stated in this narrative he simply says there are none to help. To this man’s credit he does not complain against man nor murmur against God.

“Put: literally, *cast*; indicating the hasty movement required to bring him to the water before its agitation should have ceased.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

v8 Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. : “Our Lord does not first demand faith and repentance. He heals the man in his sins, but his soul is not forgotten, v14.” [Doren, *John*]

Possible reasons for Jesus’ commands:

- to signify the permanence and totality of the healing. “*Arise*” which was to be obeyed through faith and “*take up your bed*” because he was not to return to this place of healing. “He was commanded to take up his bed that he might recognize that the cure was permanent. No doubt many of the cures at the pool were merely temporary.” [Dods, *Gk NT*] That he was permanently cured is further indicated by the commands Jesus used: Jesus was telling him to get up, pick up your mat and *keep on walking*. Wuest: “*Jesus says to him, be arising. Snatch up your pallet, and start walking and keep on walking*”
- to publically proclaim his cure. “It was consistent with the wisdom of Christ to do his miracles so that they might be seen and known by a multitude of people, and especially in Jerusalem, which was the capital of the country, and the center of the Jewish religion; and this very circumstance of the healed man carrying his bed on the Sabbath day must call the attention of many to this matter, and cause the miracle to be more generally known.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]
- to provide opportunity for the Lord to enter His protest against the superstitions and cruelties of the Jewish rulers

- to show Himself Lord of the Sabbath and therefore Jehovah
- to test the faith and obedience of the man who risked being scourged in the synagogues
- it was the Lord's custom to direct the manner of proving the miracle, for the bed would have been a symbol of victory over the disease that long enchained him.
- the man was a poor man, and if he had left his bed he might have lost it; and he could not have conveniently watched it till the next morning

The mat was a camp-bed, pallet, pad or thin mattress. "The bed of a poor Hindoo is seldom any thing besides a single mat, or a cloth as thick as a bed-quilt. Men carrying such beds may be seen daily on the highways." [Clarke, *Commentary*]

v9a And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: : he obeyed and immediately was healed. John uses the word "all at once, straightway, instantly" (eutheōs) which is common in Mark's gospel but not John's. The emphasis placed here by John's unusual use of the word is that he is stressing the suddenness complete character of the cure, glorifying the work of Christ.

The healing was not partial nor the sickness faked. As with the paralytic man lowered through the ceiling at Peter's house, this man immediately stood, his strength and coordination fully restored.

"An interesting feature of this healing is that there is nothing comparable to 'your faith has saved you,' which we find so often in the accounts of healing miracles in the other Gospels. Not only is there not mention of faith on the part of this man, but there is no room for it. When he was asked who had healed him, this man did not know. Far from trusting Jesus, he did not even know His name." [Morris, *John*]

v9b,10 and on the same day was the Sabbath. The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the Sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed. : John makes notice that this was the Sabbath which caused controversy between Jesus and the Jews (in John's gospel, speaking not of the common people but specifically of the religious leaders). "Instead of looking upon [the Sabbath] as a day of special consecration unto works of gratitude for the salvation which God had given, they viewed it as a day of cessation from all (common) work with a view to the salvation which man must merit." [Hendriksen, *John*]

Undoubtedly referring specifically to Ex 20:10, Jer 17:19-27, and Neh 13:15, the leaders said it was unlawful to work on the Sabbath. "The Rabbinical law ran: 'Whosoever on the Sabbath bringeth anything in, or taketh anything out from a public place to a private one, if he hath done this inadvertently, he shall sacrifice for his sin; but if willfully, he shall be cut off and shall be stoned.'" [Dods, *Gk NT*] But the passages in the OT clearly speaks of burden-bearing for the sake of gain, of trading and marketing. To apply that to the carrying of a bed by one healed was to mock the spirit of the law as given.

"Beginning with sunset on Friday, announced by three trumpet blasts from the Temple and synagogue, it ended at sunset on Saturday. All food must be prepared, all vessels washed, all lights kindled, and all tools laid aside. There were restrictions laid down in the Mosaic law; but the Rabbis had elaborated from these a vast array of injunctions and prohibitions, making of the Sabbath law a veritable bondage.... Two letters of the alphabet might not be written together. To kindle or extinguish a fire was a great desecration, not being justified even in case of the emergency of sickness.... It was forbidden to draw a chair along the ground lest it should make a rut; and, though it was permissible to spit on a pavement and rub the expectoration with the foot, it was debated whether it were permissible to perform the operation on the earth, forasmuch as the foot would scratch the surface.... A tailor must not go abroad with his needle nor a scribe with his pen toward sunset on Friday lest the Sabbath should begin ere his return and find him abroad with his burden." [Pentecost, *Words of Jesus*] Morris lists other oddities of their Sabbath rules: it was unlawful for a man to go out wearing one sandal on the Sabbath unless he was visibly wounded in the foot, for it would cause suspicion that he was carrying the other sandal under his cloak. It was lawful to borrow oil or wine from a neighbor as long as the words "lend me them" were not used since this might imply a transaction was being made which would involve writing. A man could not search for fleas on his garment on the Sabbath. A man could not read by lamplight on the Sabbath lest he forget what day it was and tilt the lamp to make the oil flow into the wick for better light. One could not put vinegar on a toothache in an attempt to soothe the ache since that would be a forbidden act of healing, yet one was permitted to take vinegar in the ordinary course of a meal. The Rabbis added philosophically, "if he is healed he is healed." [Morris, *John*]

"A literal rendering of the statement ('and there was a Sabbath on that day') suggests that it was not the regular weekly Sabbath, but a feast day, certain of which were treated as Sabbaths regardless of the day of the week on which they happened to fall. Passover and Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles were all to be regarded as Sabbaths." [Kent, *Light in Darkness*] "The form of the phrase is very remarkable, and suggests the idea that the Sabbath was a day of rest other than the weekly Sabbath." [Wescott, *John*]

"It should not be supposed that Jesus had forgotten what day it was, nor should it be regretted that 'unnecessary' trouble arose because the miracle was performed on that day rather than on the day before or the day following. Surely our Lord, who knew all about the man's circumstances without having to ask him (5:5) also knew what day it was. We must rather understand that Jesus chose this day to cause men to see the Sabbath in proper perspective." [Kent, *Light in Darkness*]

v11 He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. : the man's reasoning was sound: One who performed such a glorious deed as healing a shriveled-up man had the right to tell that person what to do, even on

the Sabbath. “The poor man reasoned conclusively: He who could work such a miracle must be at least the best of men: now a good man will neither do evil himself, nor command others to do it: but He who cured me ordered me to carry my bed; therefore, there can be no evil in it.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

v12 Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk? : note they don’t ask who was the man who healed you but who was it that told you to carry the bed? Their own laws had made them blind to the miracle accomplished by Christ. “In their great zeal for the maintenance of [their man-man regulations] they even forget to see the utterly ridiculous character of their complaint: they do not seem to realize that, after all, it was only a *mat* that the man was carrying. Hence, they omit even this word. As they saw it, the sin which the man was committing was this, (a) that he had *picked up* something, anything, it hardly mattered what it was, and (b) that he was *walking* away with it! They are logical, however, when they attempt to trace the awful deed to the one who had commanded it to be done.” [Hendriksen, *John*] “How transparent their hatred and deceit. Had their question sprung from earnestness and integrity, they would have inquired concerning this stupendous work of God. The miracle demanded their adoring wonder, gratitude and love. ‘Who is He, having such God-like power, who had deigned to visit this people? Who is He who has wrought on this wretched creature a cure equal to creation? For 400 long dark years God has not so wondrously visited His people. Praise His holy name, Abraham’s God still lives, to bless and save!’ No such grateful emotions arise in their cold malignant bosoms. They had no anthem of love for such a heavenly messenger. No sympathetic word for the relieved object of thirty-eight years woe.” [Doren, *John*]

v13 And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed Himself away, a multitude being in that place. : the man healed did not know who it was because Jesus had slipped away immediately following the healing. Reasons for His doing so could have been some of the following:

- to avoid a public demonstration
- to face the religious leaders themselves rather than their followers
- to allow time for the healed man’s convictions to solidify so that he could express his own convictions rather than having someone to do it for him

“Had conveyed Himself away: the verb means literally, *to turn the head aside*, in order to avoid something. Hence, generally, to *retire* or *withdraw*. Only here in the New Testament.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

v14 Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. : after these things: places an indefinite time on the situation. Was it the same day? The next, or even later? This cannot be determined by the text, although I have always thought of this as an event later the same day.

Why was he in the temple? While he could have been there for several reasons, some possibly not even religious, it would appear he was there at least to express his thanks to God for the miracle performed. “How many, when they are made well, forget the hand that has healed them, and, instead of gratitude and obedience to God, use their renewed health and strength in the service of sin! Those who make this use of God’s mercies may consider their restoration as a respite only from perdition.” [Clarke, *Commentary*] Augustine comments, “Notice, he found Christ in the temple, not in the crowd.”

There is opposing explanations as to the comment of Christ:

- the *vast* majority of commentators take this to mean the man’s infirmity was directly caused by a certain sin(s) thirty-eight years ago. Jesus’ comments therefore mean for him to stop that sin lest an even worse fate befall him. “Our Lord, intending to discover to this man who He was, gave him two proofs of the perfection of His knowledge. (1) He showed him that He knew the secret of the past — sin no more: thereby intimating that his former sins were the cause of his long affliction. (2) He showed him that He knew the future — lest a worse thing come unto thee: if thy iniquity be repeated, thy punishment will be increased.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]
- an exception to the usual interpretation is given by Hendriksen [*John*]. He states the present tense of the verb is used, so the sense is rather “no longer continue in sin”, referring to his present condition rather than something that happened thirty-eight years in the past. Wuest: “*Do not go on sinning any longer lest something worse happen to you.*” The gist is: “you are not reconciled to God. Do not continue in this state or something much worse than thirty-eight years of physical illness will happen to you.” The “something worse” is undoubtedly eternal punishment. This interpretation also coincides with the teaching of Christ in Jn 9:1-3 and Luke 13:1-5. “A worse thing than thirty-eight years of suffering, gives an awful glimpse of the severity of God’s judgments. No matter how miserable any being has been or is, he can be more so.” [Doren, *John*] “In this Gospel it is made clear that suffering is not necessarily the result of sin. Jesus told the disciples that the man born blind had not suffered his disability because of sin (Jn 9:3). But this does not mean that suffering is never the result of sin.” [Morris, *John*]

Personally I prefer the latter because (1) the typical interpretation tends to favor those who link problems with spiritual judgement, and (2) the reference to eternal punishment is a proper application. But while making sure we teach that not all difficulties are a sign of the judgement of God, we must beware lest any think that God does *not* judge in that manner! There are times of course when physical “punishment” is a direct result of sin. “Alcoholism, narcotics addiction, and sexual promiscuity are just a few examples of sins which often carry their own physical penalties.” [Kent, *Light in Darkness*]

- **The key to remember is that we are not the judge in such matters. If a person is suffering, we have a Christian obligation to respond in love and compassion, doing what is possible and scriptural to come to that person's aid. The reason for that suffering is God's business, not ours!**

- Another appropriate reminder however is that **we must be scriptural in our response. A "bleeding heart" mentality that goes beyond Christian compassion may actually hinder the work of God in that person's life.** God *does* work through difficulties, and we must be spiritually open to the leading of the Spirit as to what we can do and when to stop. (cp Dobson's "Tough Love" policy). For example if the prodigal son would have been given food while far from his father, he would still be out away from his father. *Let's not "pad the prodigal's pig-pen!"* Look for signs of genuine repentance and not a mere "I want out from under these circumstances!" It is then that God can use us to bring wanderers back to Himself.

v15 The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole. : upon learning of the identity of Jesus, the man went to the religious leaders and informed them he was healed by Jesus. While the rulers questioned "Who was it that told you to take your bedding and walk?", his response was "It was Jesus that *healed* me."

Why did the man return to the religious leaders and "tell on Jesus". It cannot be said the man was ungracious for there's no evidence in the text that would imply that he was. For fear of the religious leaders, since after all, they are the established leaders in the God-ordained religion? Note that later we find their hatred so intense that they excommunicated any who confessed Him (Jn 9:22). "Certainly the man was not a malicious informer. He may have been required to report to the authorities who his healer was in order to verify his own explanation that he had not carried his bed on the Sabbath without due cause." [Kent, *Light in Darkness*] "It is difficult to understand the motive of the man in conveying this information to the Jews, since he knew the hostile spirit in which they regarded the cure. He was certainly not ungrateful, for he still speaks of Jesus as having cured him. He may have wished to leave the responsibility of his illegal act on the Sabbath with One who had power to answer for it; or it may be simplest to suppose that he acted in obedience to the instructions of those whom, as a Jew, he felt bound to obey." [Wescott, *John*] "Some think he went to betray his benefactor as a Sabbath-breaker, but the idea of such treachery is monstrous and incredible. Much more likely he desired to honor Jesus. Little did he think his tidings would arouse such malignity." [Doren, *John*]

v16 And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath day. : were persecuting: the verb denotes continued hostile activity and not just an isolated incidence. It became increasingly hostile until it culminated with the crucifixion. Here the religious leader's reasoning for this was His doing this on the Sabbath. "Did the Jews persecute: the imperfect tense might be rendered *began to persecute*, as this is an opening of hostilities against Jesus." [Vincent, *Word Studies*] Wuest: "*And on account of this the Jews went to persecuting Jesus.*"

v17 But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. : Jesus now speaks to the leaders. Whether they addressed Him directly or He knew their thoughts is not clear. Jesus' defense was that by doing an act of mercy on the Sabbath was in keeping with the example set by the Father. Both are working, even at the present time. "The rest of God after the creation, which the Sabbath represents outwardly, and which I am come to realize, is not a state of inaction, but of activity, and man's true rest is not a rest *from* human earthly labor, but a rest *for* divine heavenly labor.... The works of Christ did not violate the law, while they brought out the truth to which that tended." [Wescott, *John*] "And I work ... or, *I also work*. The two clauses are coordinated. The relation is not that of *imitation*, or *example*, but of *equality of will and procedure*. Jesus does not violate the divine ideal of the Sabbath by His holy activity on that day." [Vincent, *Word Studies*] " 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' No angel would have dared to claim such a seat beside the throne of God!... They charged Him with blasphemy, although they themselves were committing the very sin." [Doren, *John*]

"By the 'work' of the Father we must understand at once the maintenance of the material creation and the redemption and restoration of all things, in which the Son co-operated with Him (Heb 1:3; Eph 1:9f). The form of the sentence is remarkable. Christ places His work as co-ordinate with that of the Father, and not as dependent on it." [Wescott, *John*] "Divine working does not disturb divine rest. God rests, and yet the heavens move in their courses, the sun rises, shines, and sets, the rain descends, the dew falls, the rivers run, the tides ebb and flow, and all the processes of life are carried on with uninterrupted energy and completeness." [Doren, *John*] "God created the world in six days: on the seventh He rested from all creating acts, and set it apart to be an everlasting memorial of His work. But, though He rested from creating, He never ceased from preserving and governing that which He had formed: in this respect He can keep no Sabbaths; for nothing can continue to exist, or answer the end proposed by the Divine wisdom and goodness, without the continual energy of God. So I work — I am constantly employed in the same way, governing and supporting all things, comforting the wretched, and saving the lost; and to Me, in this respect, there is no Sabbath." [Clarke, *Commentary*]

v18 Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. : The religious leaders now had an additional reason to persecute Jesus, for in stating God was His Father, He was stating an equality with the Father, to the Jews blasphemous. The Father-Son relationship may have several connotations, but here we do not have to guess: **here the Jews themselves in the Word of God interpret the meaning for us in the light of their culture and time. By stating God was My Father, in that culture, Jesus was stating an equality with God, a statement of deity. "Thus our Lord's enemies unconsciously confirm one of the highest and holiest doctrines of Christianity....** A citizen of London once became angry with the sunlight, and he vowed 'no sun should ever again shine within his home.' Closing the door and shutters and lighting with lamps, he lived many years and died as though there had

been no sun. He would with one voice justly pronounced him insane. In a similar spirit liberals and infidels deny Christ's supreme Godhead." [Doren, *John*] The burden of proof is upon the cults and liberals to make His Sonship other than an expression of deity.