

Bite Size Bible Study

A Healing at the Pool #88

By Pastor Lee

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda, which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed—and they waited for the moving of the waters. From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease they had.

One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 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?”

“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.” Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.” But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’” So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?” The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

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.” The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.
John 5:1-15 (NIV)

The feast that is mentioned here is in all probability the Feast of Passover. If it is the Passover, then it is probably the one that occurred during second year of Jesus’ ministry.

The conflict here is over the “fences” established in the Mishnah, regarding the commandment “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy”. The Pharisees had added some 1,500 additional laws to this commandment. This man is found violating one of them when he picks up his mat and begins walking. Mishnah Shabbat says, “Who ever carries out anything on the Sabbath from a public place to a private place, of a private place to a public place is punished by being stoned.” It was

these “fences,” not the Oral Law itself that Jesus was opposing. By building all those fences the Pharisees had made the Law a burden instead of something that brings liberty, freedom and joy to God’s people. The intent was that if you set the “fences” far enough from the Law no one will even get close to breaking God’s Law. That is not what God intended. The Sabbath was to be a joy.

In the course of Jewish tradition the Sabbath had become highly personified, and it was viewed as the “bride of Israel.” Every Friday night at sundown, the Jews gathered to sing a special song called “*Lechah dodj*, meaning “Come my lover to welcome the Sabbath”. In Jewish theology Israel was created for the purpose of honoring the Sabbath.

The first point that we should notice is that Jesus is indeed in a debate with a group of Jews who were questioning His authority to heal a person on the Sabbath. Notice that they do not question the healing itself, it is the breaking of one of the “fence” laws (made by man), i.e. carrying a mat on the Sabbath. Someone has just received a miraculous healing, but that is not even noticed.

Jesus’ central point is that His authority is far greater than that needed to set aside these “laws”. The healing was simply a sign of a more significant authority than they had yet seen. It is Jesus that they will meet on that final judgment day. The issues of faith and works here are actually peripheral to the main point that Jesus is making.

Now, we could get very upset with anyone who has a mindset like this. But, before we get too indignant with the Jews, we should remember that some things we have in Christianity are just as legalistic as this. So before we condemn others, we need to first take a hard look at own actions. Whenever we put a qualifier in front of the word "Christian," we run the risk of inserting legalism. “You must do ‘this or that’ or you can’t be a Christian.” “If you don’t do ‘this or that’ you aren’t a Christian.” These mindsets are often to exclude certain individuals. **Jesus is inclusive not exclusive.**

Can sin cause sickness and misfortunes? Evidently from this passage it can. And to take it another step further, if we resort back to that sin after being delivered from it, a worse condition can come upon us. Sin is not something that should be taken lightly. But notice that the type of sin is not revealed.

Jesus’ emphasis is always on restoration, not condemnation.

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