

Honoring the Son (John 5:1–17)
Part 1, the Healing at Bethesda
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Introduction

John's focus on *signs* was to authenticate the Savior's assertion that He was the *Christ* (Messiah). The *signs* were designed to *prove* the assertion but not necessarily to produce *faith* in the observer. For example, the woman at Sychar saw no miracle but heard the word of the Messiah and believed in Him. The focus of John is also the revealing of the *person* of Christ. Signs gave testimony to His claim, but His *words* produced new life in dead sinners (John 6:63).

The signs gave opportunity for the word, but signs also provoked the Jews' hostility to Christ, which eventually led to the cross. Chapter 5 begins with such a sign, the healing of a man with no faith for either the healing or his own salvation. John provides a dramatic contrast between the healing of the nobleman's son in Galilee at the end of chapter 4 and that of a paralytic in Jerusalem at the opening of chapter 5.

I. A Contrast in Healings

1. The healing in Galilee was *requested* by an anxious and distraught father. When Jesus rebuked him ("*Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe*"—4:48), he brushed off the reprimand, desperate for his son's life.
 - a. He knew that Jesus could heal his son. Astonishingly, when Jesus said, "*Go; your son will live,*" the father did not rush home to see if His word was true. He remained in Cana the rest of that day. He simply believed Jesus' word (v. 50). That trust led to his salvation as well as that of his house (4:53). He was not seeking miracles, but he wanted some-thing that he knew only Jesus could give him, the life of his son.
 - b. For what do you believe Jesus? Salvation is God's means to restore Jesus to His rightful place as Lord of our lives.
2. The second healing in Jerusalem was *not* requested by the obviously dull invalid. Although he appeared to seek healing, he made excuses for why it wasn't going to happen to him. He did not know Jesus, nor did he care to know Him.
 - a. This miracle was to serve Jesus' challenge to the Jews who were already hostile to Him.
 - b. Jesus chose this man for healing because He knew the man would betray Him to the Jews to save his own hide.
 - c. Jesus did not give this man eternal life, as 5:14 indicates.

II. The Occasion of the Healing

1. Jesus returned to Jerusalem for an unnamed feast.
 - a. The place of healing was a series of pools near the Sheep Gate, called in Aramaic, *Bethesda* ("house of mercy"). The pools apparently had some healing properties associated with them (v. 3) because invalids (blind, lame, and paralyzed) occupied the colonnades, waiting for the waters to be "stirred up" or "troubled."
 - b. For what do you believe Jesus?
2. Jesus singled out the man whom John described as a *paralytic* (one who is dried and withered) and asked him, "*Do you want to be healed?*" (v. 6).

- a. Jesus knew that the man had been in that condition and in that place for a long time—38 years. A sovereign choice on Jesus’ part is also clear, for He approached this particular man among the many blind, lame, and paralyzed people who were waiting for healing with His question.
 - b. Why this man? (1) This man was willfully blind. His paralysis was due to a physical malady, but his blindness was due to spiritual paralysis. (2) A sign that others were seeking from Him was about to occur, but the importance of the sign would be lost because of the people’s natural hatred for the Savior and failure to see Him for who He was—One who shares *equality* with God. (3) This is especially true since Jesus performed this miracle on the *Sabbath* day.
 - c. Was Jesus determining the willingness of this man to be healed? No, He was demonstrating the spiritual blindness of this invalid and the Jewish leaders who would react to His miracle of healing.
3. The man’s condition
- a. His condition was hopeless because he was powerless to effect his own cure. Although he was not happy with his condition, he really did not want to be healed. He wanted to be left alone, not due to despair of his condition, but because he found a kind of satisfaction in his predicament.
 - b. He was steeped in spiritual blindness. In view of the text to follow, we conclude that the man was like those in every instance in John’s narrative up to this point—steeped in their own spiritual blindness.
 - c. Jesus met his response with a powerful Word: “*Get up, take up your bed, and walk*” (v. 8).
4. The man’s response to the healing
- a. He simply obeyed Jesus and left with no attempt to express gratitude or to ascertain who had done this marvelous work in his behalf.
 - b. He was confronted by the Jews who reminded him that it was unlawful to carry his bed on the Sabbath day. He again made excuse (v. 11).
 - c. Later, Jesus found him in the temple and warned him that his prior condition was due to his sin. The Greek is explicit: “*Stop sinning.*” If the man continued to sin, Jesus warned that something worse would come upon him. It is obvious from this that the man was not given eternal life or forgiven of his sins. Jesus healed him but did not save him.
 - d. The man immediately went to the Jews and reported that it was Jesus who had healed him. He either willingly betrayed Jesus, or he was so ignorant that he did not know that he was bringing trouble on Jesus. Whatever was in his mind, he clearly had little respect for Christ.

Conclusion:

1. John used the event to address the issue of the contrast between those who believed on Jesus because of miracle signs and those who were genuinely born of God. There are four instances of spiritual blindness in these early chapters of John’s Gospel:
 - a. The Jews asked Jesus by what authority He cleansed the Temple—what sign He would do to support that authority.
 - b. Nicodemus was told that he could not *see* the kingdom of God unless he was born again.
 - c. Jesus offered the woman at the well living water springing up unto eternal life.
 - d. The disciples were miffed at Jesus’ refusal to eat their lunch, failing to understand that His true food was to do the will of God and finish His work.
2. This incident prepares the reader for the confrontation of the Jews and the extended discourse addressing His authority and the need for all to “*honor the Son.*”