



INTRO:

I think I've shared with you before, but years ago, in seminary, I stumbled upon a quote by a commentator named Walter Marshall. And I know we all have those things that, for one reason or another, end up just sticking with us **right**/maybe a saying or a song lyric/in my case, it was a quote by this particular commentator. He said this: *"You cannot love God if you're under the continual, secret suspicion that He's really your enemy!... You simply cannot love God UNLESS you know and understand how much he loves you."*¹ And of course, Marshall's point is that if you're skeptical about who God is/how He feels about you, you'll never draw near to Him. Even more generally: if you have ANY false idea about who God is, no matter how insignificant it may seem, ultimately/and SADLY you're gonna be lead AWAY from God and His life for you.

Understanding that, what we've been doing this fall/as you know, is systematically working through the Gospel of John. BECAUSE John is not only the most famous account we have of the life and ministry of Jesus, BUT because it's this really great corrective to false notions we might have ABOUT God. Since what you get in John is Jesus not only claiming to BE God, BUT backing those claims up with what John calls **"signs"** - these various miracles Jesus did that weren't just displays of raw power, but rather instructive. Just like a road sign instructs you about how to travel, Jesus' **"signs"** instruct us about what God's really like.

In our passage today, we get a third such **sign** - Jesus healing a lame man at a community pool. The DIFFERENCE, though, with this **sign**, from the first 2 we've seen, is that THIS ONE marks a shift from Jesus merely doing ministry to Jesus now having to DEFEND His ministry. Really, starting with chapter 5 today and going all the way through chapter 11 the PUBLICITY you could say Jesus has gotten up to this point is gonna quickly turn to CONFLICT, as the religious powerbrokers AROUND Jesus begin to grow increasingly hostile TO Jesus.

TEXT:²

So if you would, start with me in **v.1** and let's unpack together 2 Things: **The Sign AND The Pushback Jesus Gets FROM The Sign**. So **First, The Sign**: It says, *"After this - meaning sometime after Jesus healed the official's son that we looked at 2 weeks ago - there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there's in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids - blind, lame, and paralyzed."* - So catch the scene here. We're talking about something akin to a bathhouse for a TON of invalids...So think: a community pool, at say, Mass and Cass. And at this community pool, *"One man,"* it says, *"was there who'd been an invalid for 38 years."*³ 38 years! We don't know how old this guy is, but no matter how you slice it, 38 years is a long time. And Jesus knows as much. Cuz it says, *"When Jesus saw him lying there and KNEW he'd been there a long time - cuz of course He's God and God knows stuff - he said to him, 'Do you wanna*

¹ Walter Marshall - "The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification: Growing in Holiness by Living in Union with Christ"

² Works Consulted:

- 18 - On Healing Spiritual Paralysis - John 5:1-18 // 19 - Conflict Over the Sabbath - John 5:1-18 // 20 - The Claims of Christ - John 5:19-30 // 21 Receiving the Witness of the Word - John 5:37-47 - R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 145-169.
 - The Pool - Seeing Jesus - February 2, 2014 - John 5:1-18 // The Great Divide - Gospel of John, Part 1 - March 3, 1991 - John 5:24-30 // Finding Jesus - A Public Faith - November 24, 2013 - John 5:31-47 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive, 2012-2013* (New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013-14).

be healed?'”...Now, be honest, that seems like a ridiculous question **doesn't it?** Like asking someone stalled on the side of the road, if their car's broken down. Or when I do a hospital visit, asking the person I'm visiting, *“So are you hoping to feel better?/Nah, I'm just here for the food!”* It seems ridiculous **right?** UNTIL you realize that what it's showing you is that **Jesus is not distant or ambivalent to your needs and desires.** Rather, He actually knows em and wants to meet you IN em, before you ever express em!

“So the sick man answered him, ‘Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water's stirred up, and while I AM going another steps down before me.’” So catch what he's saying: Jesus has just asked him if he wants to be healed **right?** But instead of saying, “yes!” he talks about how he can't get into the pool when the water's stirred-up. **What's he saying?** Two things: **One**, He's expressing what was a commonly-held Hebrew belief at the time that certain pools like this possessed healing powers - that an angel would mysteriously stir up the waters so that whoever got in could be healed. And you say, *“that sounds a little primitive/we moderns don't believe stuff like that.”* And true, maybe not stuff EXACTLY like that, but you understand countless numbers of very modern people today spend very modern money and time to essentially do things out of a very similar belief; like for example: traveling to holy sites, visiting religious relics, or just participating in supposedly restorative practices. I mean, a large portion of the tourist economy of a nation like Iceland is based upon inviting people to experience their hot springs and the supposed healing effects OF those springs **right?** Not to mention, the fascination most of our city/maybe you have with vitamins, supplements, superfoods and the like, which despite being a multi-billion dollar industry isn't totally PROVEN to foster health and healing.³ **My point is: We're not SO different from these folks here.** We too hold very “spiritual” beliefs INCLUDING - as this invalid is **ALSO** expressing here - the belief that God essentially helps those who help themselves. Cuz notice, when Jesus asks this guy if he wants to be healed and he responds with NOT being able to get into the pool, what he's really saying is, *“I believe God, angels, some higher being can help me. I just know I have to take the first step. I gotta get into that pool. God can help me, but I gotta move first.”* **Ya see that?** That's *“God helps those who help themselves.”* Or we might say, *“Participate in these sacraments and God'll confer grace upon you!”* Or *“if you wanna change, implement these spiritual disciplines, take these classes, read these books, obey in these areas.”*...Sadly, it's all a form of “God helps those who help themselves.” And I say “sadly” because ya notice, Jesus has none of it! He says, *“Get up, take up your bed, and walk. And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.”* So no, *“Man, I really appreciate your desire to partner with me on this, cuz together I think we can really get you to the next step.”* No! No partnership. No participation. No you pulling your weight and Jesus pulling His. No Jesus, ya know, as your “spiritual-spotter,” who's there to keep ya from dropping the barbell of life on yourself or just help ya get that last rep in so that you can become a better you. No! Just Jesus totally, graciously, and even gratuitously healing!

Cuz think about it: No only does Jesus heal this guy without this guy doing anything, but this guy didn't even come to Jesus in the first place; Jesus came to him. He didn't ask Jesus for

³ For further insight into our modern skepticism about miracles: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-miracles-of-christ/>

something; Jesus asked Him. He never even asked Jesus to be healed. Jesus INVITED him to be healed. PLUS, that little detail about being 38 years-paralyzed? That's to show you that this guy is literally and unalterably broken. AND not just physically, but spiritually too, since according to Jesus down there in **v.14**, his paralysis seems to be the result of some kind of sin in his life. NOT TO MENTION: He's got terrible theology, cuz he mistakingly thinks he can partner with Jesus FOR salvation, rather than seeing Jesus AS his salvation. THEN when he gets that salvation/that healing, he doesn't even really appreciate Jesus for it, since you see down in **vv.14-15**, Jesus has to seek HIM out/find HIM in the temple, RATHER THAN than/as we'd expect, this guy seeking Jesus out and being like, "*Master, thank you! From now on, I'll follow you.*" None of that! And to top it all off, the guy doesn't even appear to be well-liked in the first place, since for 38 years there's not a single person in the "*multitude of invalids at the pool that was willing to help him into the water?*" Prolly cuz he wasn't a real likable guy!...In EVERY way, this guy is a model of lostness. And YET, Jesus graciously and gratuitously heals him!

So what are you supposed to see with this? If this sign is instructive, what are you supposed to learn? You're supposed to learn/*listen*: **That in Jesus is all life. And Jesus graciously doles out life to whom He pleases.** In other words, you're supposed to see, via this snapshot here, that the message of the Bible is NOT, "*God saves the worthy and the deserving.*" Cuz if that were true this story would be about a man, who in his brokenness, mustered up the faithfulness to seek out Jesus. And then Jesus, as a way of rewarding that faithfulness, helped him into the water thereby healing him, so that that man then did the right thing and returned to Jesus with gratitude and even more faithfulness for years to come. That'd be the story! But of course, that's NOT the story, because that's NOT the message of the Bible. Rather, what you actually have is a man who, like the woman at the well before him, and the wedding guests in Cana before her, and like a whole bunch of prophets, patriarchs, kings, and judges before them, who didn't seek God's grace, didn't deserve God's grace, don't participate in God's grace, and don't even appreciate God's grace once they get it. And YET, they STILL get it! THAT'S the message! That all life is in Christ, and therefore the only way you'll EVER become what you should be is if the life of Christ graciously comes into YOUR life! ***That's the Sign! Do ya see it?***

So ***Second, The Pushback Jesus Gets FROM This Sign:*** Cuz of course, anytime we're told that we don't get to participate, control, or take credit, we can get offended ***right?*** And the Jewish leaders around Jesus were no different. It says, "*Now the day (on which the man was healed) was the Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who'd been healed, 'It's the Sabbath, and it's not lawful for you to take up your bed.'*" ***Think about that?*** Here's a man who's just been miraculously healed after 38 years/38 years! And instead of rejoicing with him, these people - the one group of people who should've been the MOST excited to see a move of God like this - are instead cutting this guy down. And to be sure, their inability to rejoice here DOES go back to a very laudable attempt to protect the Sabbath, in obedience to God's law. It's just that the irony is that God instituted the Sabbath as a way to help ELEVATE your life - give you opportunity to experience the physical and spiritual renewal you need, by regularly celebrating the presence and power of God. And TO-A-T that's what this invalid got. And YET, these leaders are trying to squash it. ***Why?*** BECAUSE as Donald Grey Barnhouse said, "*They wanted rules. They didn't*

want grace. They wanted human merit. They didn't want the simplicity of divine pardon. They wanted to do something for themselves." To put it plainly - and like a lot of us - they're legalists, meaning they're not interested in loving and celebrating so much as they are in observing and controlling... You understand, no matter how disciplined, holy, spiritual, put-together, or just bent toward setting things right, you are; if your default is to find fault before it is to love, you need to understand - just like these Jews - you're in opposition to Jesus. Cuz as the Apostle Paul said in **1 Corinthians 13**, "*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels - meaning you can do all kinds of grand, moral, religious, progressive stuff - BUT I have not love, I'm just a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*" Meaning, a worthless annoyance! That was these leaders! ***Is it in any way you? Is your desire to be right, be in control, make yourself approved, get ahead...ironically causing you to be against Jesus AND destroy rather than love those around you?***

So the healed man says to these leaders, "*The man who healed me, said to me, 'Take up your bed, and walk.'* (So) they asked him, '*Who is this man? ...Now the man who'd been healed didn't know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, 'See, you're well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.'* - And what a statement, because **THAT, friend, is the beautiful order of the Gospel!** The Gospel is NOT obey to BE accepted. BUT rather, in Christ you ARE accepted - forgiven, loved, justified...healed! So now obey/sin no more...So "*The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who'd healed him. And THIS was why the Jews were PERSECUTING Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered em, 'My Father is working until now, and I am working.'* THIS was why the Jews were seeking all the MORE to KILL him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, he was even calling God his Father, making himself equal with God." **So you see the progression here?** What began as curiosity on the part of these leaders, quickly turns to HYPocrisy, as they launch a full-scale investigation of Jesus...on the Sabbath, AND THEN hypocrisy, which turns to persecution and ultimately murderous rage...ALL of it telling you 2 things: **One**, Just how much Jesus loves you! Cuz you understand, the minute Jesus healed this guy the way He did, He knew it was gonna provoke the establishment to come after Him. And YET, He did it anyway. Willingly signed His death warrant. **Why?** To show the lavishness of His love for you! That even if you aren't seeking Him today; even if you haven't been grateful to Him this week; you've pursued things other than Him for your happiness; you don't know what to make of him theologically, or you just feel broken beyond repair, He wants you to know, "*that for the joy set before Him - the joy of having you back WITH Him - He endured the Cross.*" And as such "*His grace is sufficient and His power is made perfect in your weakness.*" He loves you that much!

But **Two**, you gotta see that because of what Jesus did here it means you don't have to be like everyone else LIVING under the crushing weight of having to make yourself worthy! Cuz see when Jesus says there in **v.17**, "*My Father's working until now, and I'm working*"; He's not only equating Himself to God, BUT He's saying that His restorative work, as evidenced by what he did for this invalid, is what the Sabbath's all about! In other words, He's saying to these leaders, as He's ALREADY said in John, "*I'M the Lord of the Sabbath!*" I'm the One in whom that deep soul-rest you long for, is found! Cuz of course it's one thing to rest physically for a day or so

right? But it's quite another to BE at rest as a person - be justified. That's a "redemptive work" that only Jesus can do... For you 80's kids you'll get this, but ya remember that great scene in Rocky 1 when Rocky and Adrian are out on the skating rink and Adrian asks Rocky - Sylvester Stallone - why he wants to fight the world champ, KNOWING that it could literally be his last fight if he's not careful. **Remember what Rocky says?** He says, "*Adrian, I have to go 15 rounds with this. Because if I can go 15 rounds then I'll know I'm not a bum.*"⁴... Friends, every one of us has something like those 15 rounds/something you're looking to, to justify you and help you escape a sense of "bum'ness"/that mom guilt; that not wanting to be sus, trolled, canceled, or just found lacking in any way. And so you look to those "15 rounds," - might be achieving a certain status in your career, making a certain level of grades; getting into a certain degree program, being a good parent, being dateable, married, even like with these leaders: being religious, moral, a good Catholic, good Christian, just a good person. But whatever it is, it never lets you rest. Cuz if you work for it and DON'T get it, you've just confirmed your sense of being a bum **right?** And if you DO get it, it's EITHER never enough OR becomes something you're perpetually afraid of losing. Either way, you can't rest and subsequently... can't be joyful. Just like these leaders you'll always be working, earning... and therefore critiquing, stifling... and opposing Jesus.

The pushback Jesus got is the pushback we ALL give UNTIL you realize, not only, that there's no life APART from Jesus, BUT that the life JESUS offers you - like with this invalid - isn't a life of reform and helping you do better and be better... but a life of rescue. HIS life for yours/ HIS death INSTEAD of yours. **Friend**, UNLESS you rest in what He's DONE, you'll have to do the work He DID, which is: uphold the law perfectly/justify yourself perfectly, which if that doesn't kill you first, will AT BEST cause you to turn the GOOD things in your life... into GOD things - things you don't just work hard at cuz their good, but things have to HAVE cuz they're your justification/you're salvation! You'll never be at rest!

So let me close with this: There's only two characters in these verses that you and I could possibly see ourselves in: There's the invalid and the religious leaders. And the irony/really the shocking nature of God's grace in Christ, is that those who appear to have it altogether/work HARD to have it altogether - the religious leaders - they're the ones who end up losing the presence and power of God that was standing RIGHT in front of them. Whereas, the one who didn't have it together/could never justify himself/the model of lostness - the invalid - ended up experiencing the presence and power of God in an UTTERLY transformative way. It feels so backward **doesn't it?** God helping those who CAN'T help themselves rather than helping those who HELP themselves? But Friend, that's because our God is NOT One who gives you tips and tricks for "*how to get into the pool,*" as it were, but who tells you, "*get up and walk.*" **And how can He do that?** Because, as He says, not only has He "*been working until now,*" but in Christ He's declared the work "*finished,*" so that all you have to do is being willing to admit you're the invalid and then look in dependence on Christ today! **Will you do that?...** **Let's Pray:** "*Father, we thank you that you have shown us AGAIN, through this miraculous sign, that your Son, Jesus Christ, is not just our helper. He's not just our model, our exemplar... He's our Savior. He doesn't*

⁴ Illustration cited in "Christianity is too restrictive" - *Why I'm not a Christian*, Msg. 3 John 8:31-38 - J.D. Greear

*just help us get into the water; he IS the water. He doesn't just help us work ourselves out of that sense of unworthiness we have; he IS our worthiness...our rest. We thank you that he went through such agony and died on the cross so we can say it really is "finished" ...and rest. Father, please, make these truths a reality to us now through the Holy Spirit. We pray this in your name!"*⁵

⁵ This prayer is from: Timothy J. Keller, "[The Pool](#)," in *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive, 2014–2015* (New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2014), Jn 5:1-18.