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The So-Called Crime John 5:1-9

Is there something in your life that you have struggled with for so long that you have given up any hope that it will ever change? Is there something in your life that you have struggled with for so long that you have come to the point where you have grudgingly accepted it as a part of your life? Is there something in your life that you have struggled with for so long that the idea of being truly healthy, not so much in body but in mind and spirit, has been buried under a mountain of disappointment.

I am here this weekend to share with you that there is hope. I am here this weekend to tell you that things can change. This will become very clear to us in the passage that we will examine this weekend.

It just so happens that the passage that we will examine this weekend represents a major transition in our study of the Gospel of John, therefore it seems only fitting that we quickly review what we have already covered.

We began by examining the prologue in **John 1:1-18**. In this examination we learned a number of reasons why Christ, who was referred to as the "Word," was qualified to reveal God to man. What were those reasons?

What we learned about the Word and *God* in John 1:1-2 makes Jesus qualified to reveal God to man. What else?

What we learned about the Word and *creation* in John 1:3-5 makes Jesus qualified to reveal God to man. What else? What we learned about the Word and John the Baptist in John 1:6-8 makes Jesus qualified to reveal God to man. What else? What we learned about the Word *incarnate* in John 1:9-14 makes Jesus qualified to reveal God to man. What else? What we learned about the superiority of the Word to certain *prophets* in John 1:15-18 makes Jesus qualified to reveal God to man.

After giving us this list of reasons in the prologue the apostle then introduced to us what Merrill Tenney calls "the period of consideration." This particular section goes from John **1:19** to **John 4:54**. Within this section we examined the honeymoon stage of Christ's public ministry. In this section we considered the very earliest stages of Christ's ministry when there was no concerted effort to oppose Him or to do Him harm.

In this particular section we considered the following:

The witness of John the Baptist in **John 1:19-34**.

The presentation of two of John's disciples Andrew and Nathanael in **John 1:35-51**.

The wedding at Cana in **John 2:1-11**.

Christ's trip to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover in **John 2:12-25**.

The conversation with Nicodemus in **John 3:1-3:21**.

The confession of John the Baptist in **John 3:22-36**.

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Christ's ministry in Samaria while He was returning back to the area of Galilee in **John 4.1-42**. The healing of the royal official's son in **John 4:43-54**. This of course was the last section that we just completed studying.

We are now going on to a new area in our study of this Gospel. We are entering into a section that Merrill Tenney calls "The period of controversy." This section starts in **John 5:1** and goes to **John 6:7**. In this section we will see the emergence of opposition to the person and work of Christ.

This period of controversy and the emergence of opposition begins with a very well known story about a healing that took place near the pool of Bethesda. This healing and the events that subsequently follow in **John 5:1-47** could be described in terms of a judicial proceeding. Therefore the question that we will be seeking to answer is this: What basic elements of a *judicial* proceeding do we find in John 5? There will be several basic elements.

This weekend we will only begin to examine the very first element. I would hope that as we examine this very first element of a typical judicial proceeding that it would help us not to look at our own personal struggles as hopeless. I would hope that as we examine this very first element of a typical judicial proceeding that it would help us to see that our future can be far brighter than our past. What is the very first basic element that we encounter in our study of John 5?

The first element of a judicial proceeding that we find in John 5 is the *crime* and the initial investigation (John 5:1-15). I could read this entire section, but it is rather lengthy. What I would like to do is to read for you only that portion of Scripture that we will be able to examine this weekend.

Let me read for you **John 5:1-9**. "**After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. (2) Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. (3) In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, [waiting for the moving of the waters; (4) for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.] (5) And a certain man was there, who had been thirty-eight years in his sickness. (6) When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, 'Do you wish to get well?' (7) The sick man answered Him, 'Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me.' (8) Jesus said to him 'Arise, take up your pallet, and walk.' (9) And immediately the man became well, and took up his pallet and began to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day.**" What does this section of Scripture describe?

This section of Scripture, John 5:1-9, describes the crime. Obviously, what it does not describe is the initial investigation, which we will have to wait until next week to consider. And what exactly is the crime? The alleged crime was that a man who was paralyzed had been healed on the Sabbath. We see this particular viewpoint represented in **John 5:10** when the Jews told the man that was healed, "**It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible (or in other words it is not legal) for you to carry your pallet.**" Let us now go back and look at the events that led up to this supposed crime and then of course to the supposed crime itself.

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Let us look at **John 5:1**. "**After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**" What does it mean, "**After these things?**" It might appear that Jesus went up to this particular feast immediately after the events associated with the healing of the official's son at the end of **chapter 4**, but we know from the synoptic Gospels that this is not the case. We know that there were a number of things that took place in the area of Galilee after the healing of the official's son which are not recorded in this Gospel that took place before this particular trip to Jerusalem. However, this doesn't change the correctness of what John says. It was indeed "**after these things**" recorded in **John 4** and of course after many more things recorded in other Gospels that Jesus went up to Jerusalem for the feast of the Jews.

What feast was this? Unfortunately, John does not tell us what feast this was and it really doesn't matter. All we need to know is that because of this feast, whatever it was, Jesus felt that He once again had to leave the area of Galilee to travel to Jerusalem. Did He go back through Samaria? It does not tell us, but I would suppose that He did.

Now let us read **John 5:2**. "**Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticos.**" In 1888 an excavation revealed Bethesda to be near the present day church of Saint Anne in the northeast quarter of the Old City (near Nehemiah's Sheep Gate).

Now we come to **John 5:3**. "**In these (or in other words in the shelter of these porticos) lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered.**" When Jesus visited this pool there were not just a few sick people there, but rather there was a multitude of sick people there. But why were they there? A multitude of sick people were at Bethesda because they believed that they might be miraculously healed.

Anytime people believe that they might be miraculously healed, if they visit a certain place, a multitude of people will come. This is why 5,000,000 visit a city of 17,000 each year in Lourdes, France. And this is why sick people were gathering here at Bethesda. This will be very clear as we study more of the text.

So now let us continue to read **John 5**. What does it say? It says, "**In these (in the shelter of the five porticos) a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, [waiting for the movement of the waters; (4) for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease which he was afflicted.]**" What an incredible passage. This is a shocking passage. This passage is telling us that an angel would periodically come to this pool to stir the waters and the first person who stepped into the water after the water was stirred would be healed. Now this would be great for the person who was healed but what about the rest?

It seems rather cruel. Can you imagine the emotions that would be present when people who were suffering so greatly thought an angel had stirred up the water? Can you imagine the emotions that would be stirred when they thought they had to be the first person into the water in order to be healed? These very sick and disabled individuals would be literally crawling over each other in order to get to the water.

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The law of the jungle would have been fully operational each time these people thought that an angel was stirring the water.

Is this something that we are to believe? Let me put it this way. If the apostle John wrote these words as a statement of fact, as it appears he did from what we have read, then certainly this is what we would have to believe. Fortunately this is not the case at all.

The last half of John 5:3 and the whole of John 5:4 were not the inspired words of John but a later addition by some well meaning but misled scribe. These words, as we will see later, very much reflected what the people believed about the healing power of the waters of Bethesda, but these words recorded for us in the last half of **John 5:3** and the whole of **John 5:4** were not written by John. Therefore, they may be interesting, but they are not inspired.

Why do I believe that this specific text is not inspired? First of all, in the NAS Bible you will notice brackets around the text that I have been talking about. These brackets indicate that these particular verses have very poor textual support, and the NIV Bible goes even further. The NIV does not even include this rather dubious section in their translation at all. The reason why we need to skip from the first part of **John 5:3** to the beginning of **John 5:5** is because the Apostle John, based on very strong textual evidence, never wrote these words between the verses that I just indicated. So we need to move on to **John 5:5**.

What do we learn about this multitude of sick people who have gathered at Bethesda for the purpose of healing as we move forward into **John 5:5-9**?

We learn from John 5:5-9 that from the multitude of sick people at Bethesda there was only one man that Jesus chose to heal. Someone might ask why didn't He heal all of them? The answer is rather simple. This is not the reason why He came. The Scriptures tell us that He came to seek and save that which was lost. Apparently Jesus felt that healing this one particular man was more important to His overall mission than healing of all of them.

What do we learn about this one particular man? Let us read **John 5:5**. "**And a certain man was there, who had been thirty-eight years in his sickness.**" The man Jesus chose to heal had been sick for 38 years. Why did Jesus pick this man for the purpose of healing?

It would appear since John tells us that this particular man had been there for 38 years that Christ's choice was based on the length of time that this man had been at this particular pool hoping to be healed. Over the course of 38 years this man had never been able, according to the beliefs of that day, to get to the water quickly enough to be healed.

Now let me ask you this question. "In light of this fact, how would people view his future prospect of success? In light of his past failures people would have given him a zero chance of ever being healed at Bethesda.

It was not only people in general that would have given him a zero chance of being healed. It would appear in light of his past failures that the man that Jesus chose to heal also gave himself a zero chance of being healed (John 5:6).

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If this was true that he had no hope then why was he still there? Leon Morris said the following: “This 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 have made a living. And certainly after all those years people would have known him and would have known where to find him if they wanted to help him financially with a gift of alms.”

This is why he was still there at the pool of Bethesda even though any realistic hope of ever being miraculously healed in the waters of Bethesda was long gone.

Let us go on now to read **John 5:6. "When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, 'Do you wish to get well?'"** What an incredible question.

It may seem to us that the answer is obvious. I can't think of one incident in all the times I have made hospital visits that I ever thought it would be necessary to ask someone, "**Do you wish to get well.**"

There was a good reason I believe why Jesus would have asked this man this particular question. This man, it would appear, had given up any real hope of ever getting to the water first. This man had given up any real hope of ever being healed. This is why Jesus asked, "Do you wish to get well?" This statement was meant to stir in him the hope that had long ago disappeared. He was reminding the man of the reason why he first came to the pool of Bethesda 38 years earlier.

Perhaps some of you here this morning are not very much different than this paralytic. Perhaps you have forgotten why you first came, not to the pool of Bethesda for a physical healing but rather to Christ for a spiritual healing.

When we come to Christ for salvation we come because we want to be set free from our sin, not only from the penalty of it but also from the power of it. We don't want to live our lives as we once did, as spiritual cripples. We want to be spiritually healthy. We want to live our lives in a manner pleasing to the Lord. And certainly this is what we should expect when we come to Christ for salvation.

But sometimes, professing Christians get caught up in the things of the world and they forget why they initially came. They become like the paralytic. They have lived in defeat for so long they forget that they did not come to Christ to live a life of defeat but rather they came to live a life of victory. So the question that Jesus asked of this paralytic was an appropriate question for him. Perhaps this is an appropriate question for many of us as well.

Now we come back to the paralytic. Certainly he would want to be healed; that is what he always wanted. He just simply had lost all hope of that actually happening under the circumstances. He just could not envision it in light of everything he had experienced. How does he respond to Christ's question?

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Look at **John 5:7**. "The sick man answered Him, 'Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me.'" The comments of this man nearly parallels the account that was written by a scribe in the latter half of **John 5:3** and the whole of **John 5:4**. The only difference but a very significance difference is that this statement that John is recording is made by the paralytic and not by him.

This response by the paralytic is very predictable in light of Christ's question, "Do you want to get well" combined with his ignorance of Who was speaking to him.

The paralytic in John 5:7 did not say he did not want to get well. He just could not see how this could possibly happen under the circumstances. He just really did not understand the circumstances. The person he was now talking to was the Christ the Son of the living God.

So what happens next? Let us listen to the words of Christ in **John 5:8**. "Arise, take up your pallet, and walk." What a wonderful thing. For the very first time a true miracle had been performed at Bethesda and Christ performed it.

And we see the results of it in **John 5:9**. "And immediately the man became well." This man immediately felt his legs. For the first time in 38 or more years this is the first time he felt his legs. This man immediately not only felt his legs but he was able to see the muscle mass return to his withered legs, and what did he do? He did exactly what Christ told him to do. Let us continue to read, "And immediately the man became well, and took up his pallet and began to walk."

Everything seems so perfect. What could possibly in anyway spoil this moment? Let us now read the concluding words of this section. "Now it was the Sabbath on that day." A wonderful thing had been done, but it was done on the Sabbath. That last phrase might appear to be rather innocuous to most of us, but this was not the case 2,000 years ago. There was a group of certain Jews who very much viewed this as a crime and this will dramatically impact the course of the events that will very soon unfold.

CONCLUSION

We have entered a section of the Gospel of John that will depict for us a period of growing opposition to Jesus, and it begins with Christ performing in the eyes of certain Jews a very specific crime. Jesus had chosen to heal this paralytic on the Sabbath, but as we have seen this morning there was more going on in this story than a simple healing. It also involved reminding this man why he had come to the pool of Bethesda in the first place.

This morning I would like to do the same thing for you. Why did you come to Christ? I know why you came to Christ? I know why you by faith transferred your trust from yourself and your good works to Jesus Christ alone for your salvation. You did this in order to be set free from your sins. Not only from the penalty of your sins but also from the power of your sins. You did this because you wanted to be set free from all those things that ruled you and sought to control you.

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This morning I would like you to picture yourself standing before Christ, and I would like for you to picture Christ reaching out to you encouraging you do remember why you first came to Him in faith.

Hopefully, this weekend you can remember. Hopefully, this morning the hope that once filled you would fill you again as you humble yourself before Christ confessing your sin seeking only to live your life in a manner pleasing to Him. The question that Jesus is asking each of us this weekend is this:

Do you want to get well?