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## And So It Begins

### John 5:1-9

**Intro:** We have come to the 3<sup>rd</sup> section of the Gospel of John. The 1<sup>st</sup> section was the prologue of 1:1-18 where John establishes without question or doubt that Jesus Christ is God. The 2<sup>nd</sup> section starts in 1:19 and continues to the end of ch4. This section begins by describing the 1<sup>st</sup> week of Jesus' public ministry (1:19-2:11) and then goes on to reveal the ultimate scope of His ministry as He works in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and in Galilee of the Gentiles. This next section (like the 2<sup>nd</sup>) also covers 4 chapters (5-8) but it focuses directly on the developing opposition to Jesus Christ on the part of the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem and the Lord's response to their opposition.

Up till now, the narrative in John has been almost exclusively concerned with the Lord's dealings with individuals. There will still be individual contact in this section but the miraculous healing of the lame man in this chapter will lead to a sharp conflict with the Pharisees. Thus, we'll see a pattern develop that is important to the rest of this Gospel. Jesus does His mighty works (signs) but instead of producing faith, strenuous opposition is aroused in the hearts of the national religious leaders. This conflict will grow and intensify and eventually will result in Jesus' own execution.

The focus of this new section is important tho; for if we recognize the differences between this section and the previous one, we'll find a valuable lesson for ourselves about how we are to persevere in the service of the Lord.

Very little is accomplished in this life without a firm purpose. In sports, business, education, technology. Nearly every invention, discovery, conquest or accomplishment in history has been achieved because someone was filled with a firm purpose. Just as this is true in the secular world, so is it true spiritually. The only problem is that many believers seem to live more by whim than by a firm determination to pursue God's will; thus, many lack a firm purpose. We've all experienced this personally: whether we decide to read our Bible every day but end up just doing it for a week, or we get excited about witnessing for Jesus Christ then stop when we are confronted with the first sign of opposition.

Why do we do this? Why do Christians often lack perseverance in the Lord's service? There are many reasons but the 2 that are dealt with in this section are the dangers of hostility and success. Jesus will experience both of these real dangers in ch5 and ch6 but at the end we will still find Him firmly following the path that God laid out before Him, namely, the path of the cross. As we will see, Jesus doesn't respond to the hostility of the religious leaders with any bitterness nor does He let their criticism sway Him from His path. Also in **ch6**, Jesus refuses to allow the apparent success of His ministry to create any 2<sup>nd</sup> thoughts about what His true purpose and calling was. It's in **His** reactions that we find a pattern for ourselves. How do we avoid these dangers? By keeping our eyes upon Jesus (**Heb 12:1-2**). The Bible admonishes us to lay aside everything that might hinder us in our purpose and to run life's race and win!

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**1-** Right away, John shifts our attention to a new class of people "*the Jews*." Note that from here on out, when John uses the term "*the Jews*" he does *not* mean all the Jewish people (ethnically); he's referring to the Jewish rulers who had their headquarters in Jerusalem. It's these with whom Jesus is now about to come into conflict with.

The expression "*the Jews*" is not common at all in the other 3 Gospels. They use the phrase occasionally, most often in the expression "*the King of the Jews*," but this is at the most only about 6 times or so. John's Gospel is quite different. Here the phrase occurs some 70 times. Now, in some instances the term is neutral, or even praiseworthy, as in Jesus' statement, "**Salvation is of the Jews**" (4:22). But generally the term is used critically of the religious leaders who opposed Christ and the gospel. Thus, John insists on clearly distinguishing between the Galileans, who were Jewish in the ethnic sense, but whom he does not call Jews, and the Jews of Jerusalem. Also, in regard to Jerusalem he distinguishes between the religious leaders, "*the Jews*" and others.

It's these jealous and hostile leaders of Judaism in Christ's day who are now brought into the picture. According to the first 4 chapters of John, most of the major groupings of the nation had already responded to Christ favorably—the disciples of John the Baptist and other Judeans, the Samaritans, the people of Galilee, even (according to the previous chapter) some who were in the service of Herod. The only exception has been the

Jewish religious rulers.

We don't know which feast this is; John doesn't say and scholarly research is inconclusive. We know it's a religious feast because it is a feast "of the Jews" but in reality, it's not important that we know. The main purpose Jesus went wasn't to maintain a religious tradition but to heal a man and use the miracle as a basis for a message to the people. This miracle will serve to illustrate what He will say in vs24 about the power of His word and the gift of life.

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**2-4-** There's a very spiritual sounding principle that's been floating around for many years: "the Lord helps those who help themselves." This principle is so well known, it has become deeply ingrained in the modern mindset; so much so that people actually believe that this statement is in the Bible. Of course, it's *not!* In fact, not only is this statement *not* found in the Bible – the principle itself is not found anywhere in the Bible. Actually, the exact opposite is true! One of the great principles of the Bible is that God, the Almighty, helps the helpless. The gospel is for everyone. But that simply means that the offer of salvation is only presented to those who cannot help themselves spiritually (us).

Right here in ch5, we find one of the great biblical expressions of this principle. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> miracle of Jesus that John records. Obviously, John cannot record everything Jesus did (21:25) so he must be selective. This tells us that everything John does record serves a specific purpose. One reason this miracle is recorded is that it marked the beginning of angry disbelief and hostility toward Jesus on the part of the Jewish leaders. The 2<sup>nd</sup> reason is just as important for this story clearly illustrates how Jesus came to the weak and helpless of this earth and saved them.

All this happens when Jesus returns to Jerusalem for a feast. While in the city, Jesus passed the pool of Bethesda where lay a multitude of "sick" people. This is where He would meet the lame man. It's a pitiful picture John paints for us here. But, it's a far more pitiful picture when we realize that John is actually describing for us here the spiritually helpless and woefully hopeless condition of the entire human race. What a comprehensive description it is! It's really a twofold description. 1<sup>st</sup>, the people are called *sick*: (impotent - without strength to help themselves). Then, their disability is spelled out by 3 more descriptive terms. John calls them blind, lame, and

paralyzed.

This is the human race as it stands *apart* from the grace of God through Jesus Christ. How does God see people before He places new life in them? **Rom 5:6** tells us that it was ***when we were still without strength, Christ died for the ungodly***. Some translations use “weak,” say “helpless” or “powerless.” The Greek word itself means “infirm, feeble, unable to achieve anything great; destitute of power among men; sluggish in doing right.” In other words, God tells us that it was when we found it impossible to do anything for ourselves spiritually that Christ died for us. Of course, this was necessary because it is impossible for man to do anything by himself that will satisfy God.

Now, in case anyone was tempted to doubt the gist of John’s teaching here, he goes on to provide 3 additional terms that characterized the great multitude at the pool. These terms also characterize the human race. **1<sup>st</sup>**: *blind* – Jesus spoke of this in ch3 when He told Nicodemus, “*unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” Not only will he not see it in the future, he cannot even *perceive* it in the present (**I Cor 2:14**). **2<sup>nd</sup>**) *lame* – the story of the paralytic who was brought to Jesus by his friends illustrates our own spiritual lameness (**Matt 9:1-2**). They had to pass him on his bed thru an opening in the ceiling to get him into Jesus’ presence. He could not come on his own; he needed someone to bring him to Jesus. Jesus speaks of man’s spiritual lameness in **John 6:44**. **3<sup>rd</sup>**) *paralyzed* – the problem is not that we don’t know what we should be doing: we should be righteous, we should be like Jesus. The problem is that when it comes to living up to God’s standard, we’re paralyzed. We can agree with the Apostle Paul’s assessment of himself apart from the power of God working in his life (**Rom 7:18**).

If we take it in all its aspects, it’s truly a desperate picture John paints for us here. Yet still, it is both the glorious and necessary prelude to the gospel of God’s grace, for it is to just such people (blind, lame, paralyzed) that Jesus came.

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**5-6-** His question appears odd because it seems to ignore the entire context of the scene. The lame man was at the pool precisely because of his desire to be healed. Of course, Jesus knew why the man was there and how long he had been in this condition so the question has to mean more than just

the obvious. The answer might not be in the word *well* but rather in the word *made* (ginomai – to become). We first saw this word used in the prologue in **1:3**. it expresses the creative work of God in the physical world as well as the spiritual (**1:12**). In light of this, we should understand that yes, Jesus is pursuing this man for healing but He's also pursuing him for something much greater!

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**7-** The lame man's response is both encouraging and heart breaking. His reply reveals that it has merely been a lack of opportunity, not a lack of desire; that has kept him from benefitting from healing properties of the pool. Were there healing properties in the pool? On one hand, it seems improbable that so many people would hand around the pool for so long without ever seeing a healing occur. On the other hand, Israel had no specific direction from the Word to look to this pool for healing. From the Bible we learn that God often works in unexpected and very unusual ways but, just because something is unexpected or unusual doesn't necessarily mean it is from God. Here's a spiritual principle we need to understand – God will never reinforce false concepts of who He is. That's the heart breaking part.

It's painfully ironic that while the lame man declares that he has no man to put him in the pool, the one Man he needs is standing right before him! The lame man readily admits that he needs help but he thinks the solution is in the water just a few feet away with the magical stirring that's believed to heal the sick. Clearly, this multitude believed in some sort of superstitious magic – they were convinced that the water was infused with an impersonal power from God. Strange as it may seem, what we have here is in the very city of Jerusalem, in the shadow of the temple, a strongly held superstitious belief that points to a gross misunderstanding of God as one whose power sometimes operated as an impersonal force occasionally found in the water of this pool. How could this be possible?

I think it was possible for the people to easily believe this because the religious leaders believed it. How else could they continue to consistently and stubbornly separate what Jesus did with who Jesus was? In their view, the God they claimed to know and the power they believed He controls were not directly connected. They believed that the power of God was accessible independent of any direct working of God. A belief Jesus will refute over and over.

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**8-9-** Jesus immediately gives a 3-fold command to the sick man: “**Rise, take up your bed and walk.**” He commands the man to do the very thing he is unable to do but, within the command is the power to accomplish it. Immediately, the man obeys! The healing was instantaneous and complete. Jesus has established a new functioning identity for this man. Note: **vs9** calls him “*the man*” not “*the sick man.*” He no longer needs to rest his lame body on a mat; all he needs now are shoes for his feet. What once carried the man is now to be carried triumphantly by him!

This healing differs from many others in that, not only is there no mention of faith on the part of the man, there seems to be little room for it. He didn't even know Jesus' name or reputation. In fact, until Jesus spoke the command, his thoughts were on being healed by being placed in the pool. So, what was it that “made” he well? Nothing but the enabling and empowering word of God, to which his will responded obediently. This is how God saves sinners today!

If our salvation depended upon our recognizing Him or reaching out a hand toward Him, who would be saved? The answer is: No one. Yet instead of waiting for us to come—instead of waiting to “help those who help themselves”—Jesus Christ comes to us and speaks the words that give life.

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**9b-** What seems like the resolution of a crisis regarding the lame man concludes with a rather ominous statement on which day of the week this miracle occurred. We may think, “What's the big deal? It's not like miracles like this were happening everyday!” But, it was a big deal. The same God confusion that was believed by the great multitude of sick by the pool will also soon be made manifest in *the Jews*. The healing of infirmities like the impotent, blind, lame and paralyzed was one of the prophesied ministries of the Messiah (Isa 35:3-6). Had the religious leaders known their own Scriptures, they would have been the first to recognize their Redeemer. They were the ones who should have accepted Him and Jesus could have done His most extensive work in them. But, they were spiritually blind; insensitive to the will of God and unmoved by the work of God among them. So, Jesus turned to the masses.

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Why did Jesus command the man to carry his bed on the Sabbath? He wanted to get the attention of the religious leaders. Unfortunately, the best way to get their attention was to offend their religious sensibilities. Have you

responded to God's call of repentance on your life? How long do you think you can ignore Him before He will have to get your attention?

The lame man declared that he had no man to help him. What a terrible position to be in. My prayer for my own life is that there would never be anyone in my sphere of influence who can say that honestly. People everywhere are in great need. My prayer and concern is that, if their spiritual needs are not met, it won't be because I have dropped the ball. Christian, I hope that is your prayer as well. 😊