

“Miracle and Controversy”

February 15, 2026

John 5:1-18

I. Introduction

The earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ created a sensation in Israel that hadn't been seen before or since. He performed miraculous signs and miracles unlike anyone else, e.g., [Matthew 9:33](#) says, “The crowd was amazed and said, ‘Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.’” Even the guards sent to arrest Jesus in [John 7:46](#) said, “No one ever spoke the way this man does.” Jesus told John the Baptist's disciples in [Matthew 11:2-5](#) that these signs and miracles confirmed His identity as the Son of God and the Messiah. In [John 10:25](#) He said, “The works I do in my Father's name testify about me.” In His grace and mercy and love Jesus' miracles often reduced people's suffering. He healed the sick, raised the dead, cast out demons, and fed large crowds of people.

Excited by His astonishing miracles and forceful preaching, people initially flocked to Jesus. [Matthew 4:25](#) says, “Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.” But, as we saw last week, the crowds that followed Him primarily consisted of curiosity seekers. They followed Him for the excitement, the healings, and the free food He provided. Following the feeding of the 5000 and walking on the water, in [John 6:26](#) Jesus told the crowd that had found Him, “I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous sign but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.” Ultimately the fickle crowds rejected Jesus; [John 6:66](#) says, “From this time many of his disciples or followers turned back and no longer followed him.” Eventually, following the example of their religious leaders who had rejected Jesus, these so-called followers would scream in [Matthew 27:23, 25](#), “Crucify Him! ... ‘Let his blood be on us and on our children!’”

In chapter 5 John recorded the beginning of the shift in attitude toward Jesus from curiosity and reservation to outright rejection. Chapters 5 and 7 describe the growing opposition that He faced in Judea; chapter 6 records the opposition in Galilee. The beginning of the growing hostility toward Jesus Christ was triggered by an incident at a pool in Jerusalem known as Bethesda. Unlike the first 2 miracles

recorded by John which were somewhat private, this miracle was not only public, but it was performed on the Sabbath and led to opposition of the religious leaders. The healing at the pool and the conversations that followed can be divided into 3 parts: the Miracle, the Controversy, and Jesus' Defense. Because of time, this morning we will look at the first 2 parts beginning with The Miracle.

II. The Miracle.

The phrase "some time later" indicated that this incident took place at some time later following Christ's ministry in Galilee. John recorded only 1 incident from that particular visit to Galilee—the healing of the official's son, but the other 3 Gospels record many more events, including Jesus' extensive preaching tour and several healings including healing a demon-possessed man, Peter's mother-in-law, a leper, and a paralytic. [Luke 4:14-9:50](#) is all about Jesus' Galilean ministry. So, there are obviously several months between the end of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5 of John's Gospel.

John referred to a "feast of the Jews" 5 other times in his gospel ([2:13](#); [6:4](#); [7:2](#); [10:22](#); [11:55](#)). But this is the only one he failed to identify specifically. Although many feel that this particular "feast of the Jews" was Jesus' 2nd Passover during His ministry, there is really no indication of what feast it was. But which feast it was is irrelevant. The fact that Jesus deliberately healed a needy, lonely man on the Sabbath is the critical issue of this visit to Jerusalem. Jesus' act of mercy caused suspicion, anger, and hatred among the Jews leading to a determination that this lawbreaker and blasphemer must be killed.

With those unfamiliar with the city in mind, John explained that "there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades." Perhaps John saw some spiritual significance to this location for it was through this gate on the northeast side of the city that the animals were brought for the sacrifices and Jesus was "the Lamb of God" ([John 1:29](#)).

As some of your Bibles may indicate, the earliest and most reliable Greek manuscripts, not known in King James' time, omit the last part of verse 3 and all of verse 4. Also, the particular phrasing used in these verses aren't found in any other of John's writings, so it is assumed that this section was not part of

John's original account and for this reason, many modern translations leave these verses out or print them in the margin. The part left out reads like this: beginning with verse 3—*“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 he had.”* It would seem that in the years after John wrote his gospel, scribes added this material as a marginal note to help explain why anybody—especially a man infirm for so many years—would remain in one place for so long. The addition or omission of these verses doesn't change any part of the story or the way of salvation, so whether or not they are included isn't significant at all.

Although the superstition of the day led to the involvement of an angel in moving the water, in fact there were underground springs that periodically would bubble up in this pool. It was believed that the waters had healing powers whenever they bubbled or moved. For this reason, John wrote that alongside the pool, under the *“five covered colonnades”* for protection from the elements, *“a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.”* Among those gathered at the pool hoping for a miracle was a man who *“had been an invalid for 38 years.”* The exact nature of his illness is not shared, but he was either paralyzed or too weak to move freely on his own. Having been incurably ill for nearly 4 decades, this man provided Jesus with an opportunity to display His awesome power.

Just as He knew about the disciple Nathaniel reclining under a tree, Jesus in His omniscience knew about this man. Out of all the people gathered there around the pool, Jesus went to him and *“asked him, ‘Do you want to get well?’”* After 38 years the man had lost his hope to be healed and the thought of Jesus' healing him never entered his mind. So, rather than saying, “Yes! I want to be healed,” grumbling to One who didn't understand the situation, *“the invalid replied, ‘Sir, 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.’”*

The possibility that Jesus might heal him never entered his mind; to be fair, he didn't even know who the One questioning him was. The man's only concern was to be the first one into the pool when the water began to move. Maybe he thought Jesus could help him by waiting there with him and carrying him into the water at the right time. But he never considered that in a relatively short time, this Man would miraculously make him completely well.

Jesus gave the crippled man far more than he could have ever expected as He then commanded the invalid to **"Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."** Three things the man was incapable of doing: get up, pick up, walk. This miracle, like all of Jesus' healings was complete and instantaneous, and, since he didn't know Jesus, without faith in the One commanding him. **"At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked."** Considering Jesus' many miracles, those whom Jesus healed didn't always demonstrate faith in Him before their healing, as well as this man, e.g., those under demonic influence and the blind man in [John 9](#). Jesus healed this man even though he had no faith in Him.

The miracle would have caused no problem except for one little thing: **"The day on which this took place was a Sabbath."** Jesus could have come a day earlier or even waited a day, but He wanted to get the attention of the religious leaders. Later He would heal others on the Sabbath. It was this healing on the Sabbath that led to the controversy.

III. The Controversy.

The controversy between Jesus and the Jewish leaders goes back to the Old Testament prohibition of working on the Sabbath—[turn Exodus 31:12-14](#). The issue was that these verses didn't specify exactly what kind of work was forbidden—although it seems that one's usual employment was in view. Not satisfied with that, the Jewish religious establishment had made a list of 39 forbidden categories of work which included carrying goods. Throughout His ministry, Jesus' refusal to observe the legalistic and man-made Sabbath regulations was a major point of contention between Him and Israel's religious establishment and its religion of works. So, in this case, instead of rejoicing that the man was healed, the Jewish leaders charged him for breaking their man-made rules.

Caught in the act of violating traditional Sabbath regulations, the man attempted to defend himself by shifting the responsibility to the Man, Jesus. In [verse 11](#) the healed man “replied, ‘The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’” When the authorities “asked him, ‘Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?’” the man “had no idea who it was.” A stranger had approached him, healed him, and left without giving him His name. The man couldn’t even point Jesus out to the authorities since “Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there” and the healed man hadn’t followed after Him.

Later, Jesus found the man in the Temple and said, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” Jesus’ warning points out an important Biblical truth—some sicknesses are directly related to deliberate disobedience. [Turn to Psalm 32:1-5](#). In [1 Corinthians 11:30](#) Paul wrote, “For this reason, i.e., abusing the Lord’s Supper, many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.” But not all illnesses are the results of sin [turn to John 9:1-3](#). Because it is an important point, let me say it again: “*Not all illnesses or calamities are the result of sin.*”

Then John recorded one of the greatest acts of ingratitude and unbelief in Scripture. As soon as the healed man knew who had healed him, “the man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.” This got the authorities off his back.

Jesus had already healed a demonic on the Sabbath when He was in Galilee ([Luke 4:31-37](#)), so the Sanhedrin was already suspicious of Jesus. In their minds, not only was Jesus guilty of violating the Sabbath again, but even worse, now He was inciting another to do the same. “So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted Him.” Then Jesus added fuel to the fire by saying, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.” This statement exploded the angst of the Jews, contrary to some people’s statements, Jesus did claim to be God. John wrote, “For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God.” And so, began their open opposition against Jesus—persecution that would eventually result in His death.

IV. Conclusion

There are several things we can learn from this part of Jesus' healing at the pool. First, it is possible to experience an exciting miracle from God and still not believe in Jesus. **Turn to the Parable of the Sower—Luke 8:4-15.** Like this man who had been healed but had no concern about who Jesus was, others can experience God's goodness and still ignore the Giver. It may be because one is hard-hearted and is in love with his sin. It may be that spiritual enthusiasm is drowned by earthly things. For a variety of reasons, some decide that they aren't interested or have the time for spiritual things.

Second, from Jesus' warning in **verse 14**, **"See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you,"** it seems that sometimes man's sin and his physical or emotion condition are somehow linked. However, a tragedy or infirmity does not necessarily mean that one has sinned. **Turn to Luke 13:1-5.** Jesus was saying that suffering is not necessarily an indicator of the sinfulness of a person. But if, like David in Psalm 32, we recognize we have sinned, we need to confess our transgression to the Lord. **1 John 1:9** says, **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."** Confess means to be truly sorry for your sin and, also, implies that you will do your best not to do them again.

Thinking of the Parable of the Sower and the healed man's response to Jesus, what is your response to Jesus? In **Revelation 3:20** Jesus said, **"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me."** Have you ever admitted that you are a sinner and that you need saving from an eternity in hell? Jesus is waiting for you to let him into your heart and life by making Him your Lord and Savior. If you have made Jesus your Lord and Savior, have you opened the door to Jesus and invited Him into your life or are you too busy with other things than to get involved with "God-things?" Do you keep Him out because of the sin that you have allowed to live in your heart? The challenge this morning is for everyone: invite Jesus Christ into your heart, get to really know Him and you will be amazed at what He will do with your life.