

# **Stirring the Water at Bethesda**

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from Internet Sources)

## Introduction:

- A. John 5:1-18 - What really happened at the Pool of Bethesda?
  - 1. Was it about healing an infirmed man?
  - 2. Was it about Jesus manifesting His power and Deity?
  - 3. Was it about creating an opportunity to teach a powerful lesson about compassion vs. apathy?
  - 4. Was it about creating a set of circumstances that would lead to Jesus' crucifixion?
- B. Background
  - 1. Bethesda was a combination of a large and a moderate sized pair of pools that were near the Sheep Gate
  - 2. The pools were swimming baths with five porticos or covered porches
  - 3. Built in the 8th century BC, about 150 years after David's reign; converted to an asclepieion by Greek conquerors, a Hellenistic healing temple in the first century BC
  - 4. The name Bethesda means house of mercy and grace
  - 5. Later, a Byzantine church was built on its site, and it was not re-discovered until the 1800s
  - 6. The angel stirring the water is very likely a Jewish tradition rather than part of the inspired text. It appears to be added into the text from a marginal note written by a copyist monk. More recent translations omit verse 4. Most textual scholars and serious Bible students dismiss it
- C. Mentioned in Old Testament scripture - 2Kings 18:17; Isa. 7:3

## **I. AN UNREALIZED CURE**

- A. Bethesda was a place of sickness.
  - 1. There was a multitude of sick and disabled people there: invalid, blind, lame, and paralyzed. A sight to inspire pity and pathos in the tender hearted; a sight to engender revulsion and antipathy in the selfish
  - 2. They were there because they believed and hoped in something: the moving of the waters.
    - a. Verse 4 in the KJV offers further explanation, but textual studies show that this verse was an addition to the text
    - b. It is clear from verses 3 and 7 that those who were there believed that if they could get into the water when the waters were troubled, they would be healed.
    - c. The Greeks were the ones who told them this was a healing temple; the Omride line of kings that built it 850 years ago made them to hold water for the sheep brought to Jerusalem market
    - d. But the sick were there to be healed.
- B. Who did Jesus find at Bethesda?
  - 1. A man who waited by that pool as an invalid for 38 years.

2. How long is 38 years? Long enough for someone to be born, grow up, have a family, watch their own children grow up to make them grandparents
3. If I were this man, I would have been paralyzed since 1977
4. Even if he was born with this condition, he would have been considered old for an infirm person in that the day. He would have been known by people doing business at the Sheep Gate and by those who passed by the pool regularly

C. Lessons:

1. How many desperate people today simply want to believe in something, regardless of how unbelievable it may seem?
  - a. Does desperate need make the unbelievable real? No, it makes those in need more vulnerable.
  - b. John 8:24, 14:6 - The desperate need to begin with faith in Jesus
2. How many persons in desperate need today are ignored for years by passersby?
  - a. Being busy is not an excuse God will tolerate. Assuming someone else is responsible to take care of them is a lazy, gutless copout
  - b. Luke 10:29 - Everyone is your neighbor
  - c. My misguided brethren who think that because the church is limited to helping those who are of the household of faith, that they as individual Christians are limited that way, too.
  - d. Going to wake up in Hell next to one of the liberals they vilified in life, and learn that the liberal is there for doing with the church what the conservative failed to do as an individual

## II. AN UNABASHED COMMAND

A. Jesus asked this man if he wanted to be made whole.

1. There is no indication that the man believed on Jesus as the source of his cure; he didn't even know who Jesus was (v13).
2. Jesus asked if he wanted to be healed, and he answered that no one would help him fulfill his misguided belief
3. Jesus healed him with a command that if it came from anyone else, it would have been considered cynical mockery of his condition
4. "You need someone to lower you into the water? Why don't you just get up and walk?" Kind of question asked by the self-righteous
5. Jesus made this man whole without him asking for it.

B. Lessons:

1. One ought not to be blind to other possibilities
  - a. This man could only see his cure coming through the pool; Jesus had other plans
  - b. How often are we blinded by our own preconceptions?
  - c. Luke 18:27
2. Jesus gave the man what he needed, not what he wanted.
  - a. How often do we confuse our wants with our needs?

- b. When I study with a prospect, I steer them toward what they need, not necessarily to what they want - Matt. 6:8
3. We should be pleased and not ashamed of compassion, whether toward others or from others - 1Peter 3:8

### III. UNJUSTIFIED CRITICISM

- A. I wonder how many people walked by this man without noticing him over the course of the 38 years he was ill. But when he got up and carried his bed away, they immediately saw him
  1. It was the Sabbath day. Carrying a bed was, according to the tradition of the Rabbis, work. Hence, they criticized
  2. Imagine, after all those years of paralysis and being ignored, the first thing they say to him is, "You're sinning!"
  3. They didn't rejoice that he was healed. They can only criticize him for carrying his bed on the Sabbath. The truth is that they had failed this man for thirty-eight years. They failed to have compassion on him.
  4. Everywhere I have labored to restore some erring disciple who has been out of duty for a long time, invariably someone in the know will take me aside and say, "Now you know this person has a bad reputation or a history of falling away, blah, blah, blah."
  5. How about taking a moment to rejoice over their restoration before you begin exercising your Pharisaic bile?
- B. The healed man explains his actions.
  1. He was paralyzed but made whole. The one who did this commanded that he take up his bed and walk.
  2. The point is, that anyone who can perform such a miracle on the Sabbath has the authority to tell him what he can do on the Sabbath.
    - a. Isn't it odd that the average person gets it, but the theologians can't figure it out
  3. They ask the man, "Who told you to take up your bed and walk?" Not for any good purpose (v16)
- C. Lessons:
  1. A fool judges others when they have failed them
    - a. Matt. 7:1-5; Psalm 34:18
    - b. If you walked by and did not compassionately help them when they were in need, then you have no right to criticize them when they truly sin.
    - c. You are not numbered among the spiritual, so you may not help in their restoration - Gal. 6:1
  2. What is our attitude when good things happen to other people?
    - a. Rom. 12:15; 2Cor. 13:5
    - b. We must be honest, sincere, pure of heart as followers of Christ

### IV. UNAPOLOGETIC CONFIRMATION

- A. Without apology or hesitation, Jesus confirms the Jews charges.
  1. Jesus said that both He and His Father work on the Sabbath.

2. The Creator of the Sabbath rules over the Sabbath. His rule is that one cannot benefit himself on the Sabbath but he can bring benefit to others
  - a. Mark 3:4; Matt. 12:11-12, 8
  - b. Sabbath was made for man, not man for Sabbath - Mark 2:27

B. Lessons:

1. Do not apologize for doing what is right. Jesus offered no apology for working on the Sabbath - 2Tim. 1:8
2. The miracles Jesus performed confirmed who He is - John 5:36
3. All of God's work and word is for man's benefit - 1John 5:3, 11