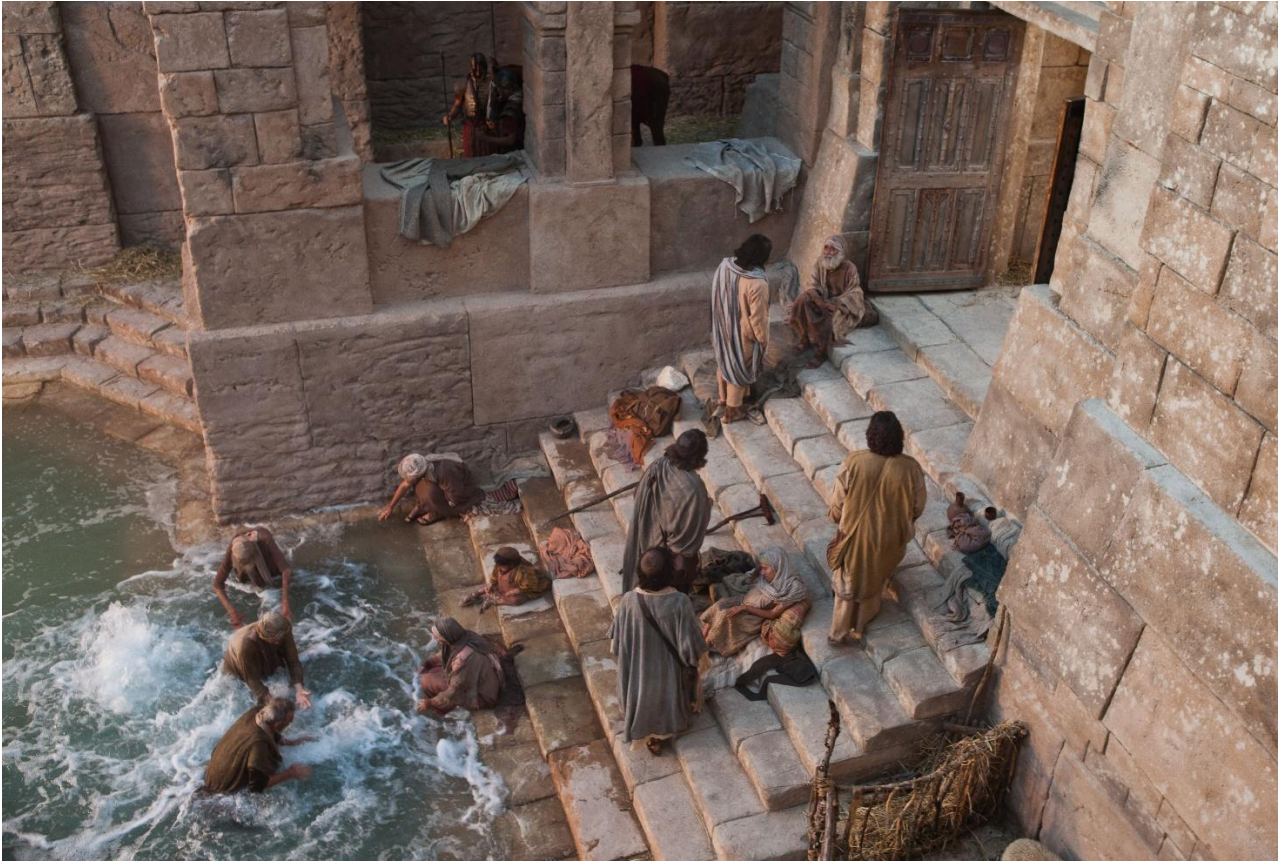


Bible Class

9th April 2026

Pool of Bethesda

John 5:1-16



This class relates to the third miracle of Jesus. It took place at a time of a feast of the Jews, in Jerusalem, at a place called Bethesda, where was a small pool of water, surrounded by five covered walkways, and here the Lord Jesus healed a man in some extraordinary circumstances.

Passage for Consideration:

Please read all verses before reading on... *John 5:1-16*

This passage has been much discussed and puzzled over, especially verses 3 and 4.

3 In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.

4 For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.

Verses NOT in the original

The 'Diaglott' a very reliable translation of the New Testament has some interesting words to say about this: *This clause is without doubt the addition of some transcriber. Five of the most ancient manuscripts either reject the whole or the principal part of this clause. Bloomfield says the whole narrative savours of Jewish fancy. Meyer calls it a legendary addition. It is omitted by Mills and Tischendorf and is marked as spurious by Griesbach.*

Out of place with Scriptural teaching

Without even referring to expert scholars of the original text, this description of the angel coming down and troubling the water is out of place with Scriptural teaching.

These are some reasons we say this:

1) John the gospel writer makes quite big issue of the miracles Jesus did, describing his first miracle, and then informing his readers of the second miracle, counting them off. Why were the miracles of Jesus healing so amazing, if an angel had for the last 38 years been healing people? If it was true an angel had been regularly healing people, why was Jesus healing so remarkable?

2) Hebrews 1:1-7 teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ was chosen to be the one through which God would teach His people, and not the angels! God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the *worlds*;... and in the last verse describes the angels *as ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*... However in this event, it is the angel who has become the focus of salvation and not the Lord Jesus.

3) The angel troubling the water does not promote the teachings of the Lord Jesus and the Gospel message but the opposite. Jesus taught the *first shall be last and the last shall be first*. Jesus taught self-sacrifice and not self-promotion. Jesus taught kindness and mercy, and that the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, that pure religion and undefiled is helping the fatherless and the widow, instead this supposed miracle of an angel – a messenger of God was designed so that the strongest and fittest who won the random process and the mad scramble down to the water on the specific day, was the one who was “healed” The whole event contradicts the example of Jesus Christ- his life and death, and how he expects his disciples to behave.

How to understand it then?

It is better to understand these verses as referring to a tradition and legend held by the Jews, and that it is given as context to teach and show the lessons and reasons behind the miracle of Jesus, and why he chose to visit the pool and expose the fundamental flaws in the teachings of the scribes, Pharisees and elders.

Reason for Legend?

It may well be that a geological fault periodically issued water laced with minerals into the pool, as is common place elsewhere, which may have been the source of the local tradition.

Traditions of the Jews were far more important to them than the keeping of the teachings behind the law. We note that this event was recorded at the time of the “feast of the Jews”. The context shows it was the feast of Purim, a feast ordained by the Jews and not God. A Jewish tradition, when there was great merriment and rejoicing when friends gave gifts to each other. (Bit like Christmas, an excuse for selfish extravagance)

Jesus against the “Traditions of men”

It was in this background that the Lord Jesus went to Jerusalem, to a class of individuals who had been forgotten by the rest, a great multitude of

impotent, vulnerable people, blind, lame, withered, at a place called Bethesda, having five porches. Bethesda means House of Mercy. Jesus in his ministry had to cut through the traditions of men taught by the elders, and Pharisees. The tradition of paying tithes of mint and anise, than the weightier things of the law, making much of washing of hands, pots and cups, of painting tombs, wearing of boxes on their heads, praying long prayers on corner of streets...

In fact by their many traditions, Jesus said that they made the law of God of none effect! see Mark 7:13.

Jesus was the one sent

It was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, that Jesus was sent, to those upon whom he had compassion, (Matthew 9:36) sheep who were without a shepherd, so we read in this 5th chapter of John, how he went through the sheep gate to this pool of Bethesda to these impotent people steeped in human tradition. Of course, if Jesus was going to this place to heal someone, if an angel was already healing someone, would not Jesus' visit be superfluous and unnecessary? But if it was just tradition as we are strongly suggesting, then of course it makes sense, as Jesus' desire was to show the true power which would come from God, and not the vain notions of men.

Jesus was the one sent, not another angel – see Acts 2:22. The miracles, and wonders and signs which were exclusively carried out by Jesus at this time were designed to show his authority, as John's disciples realised, (Matthew 10:8) to prove he was sent by God to do His will, to bear witness to the Truth. Every miracle Jesus performed was a living parable, a teaching as opposed to tradition, a lesson for us to mediate upon.

These sick and deformed people had gathered under the shadow of the temple. The sheep gate was so called, as it was where over the years the sacrificial animals had been driven through on the way to the temple to be offered. According to the book of Nehemiah, this sheep gate had been built by none other than the high priest himself! But if the priesthood and

Levites had faithfully kept the work of the temple and kept their flock, curses would not have befallen the people with so many impotent and sick and withered people. (Exodus 15:26) They all represented the condition of the nation of Israel at the time, who were sick and withered in their minds, cluttered with human tradition, who believed in self-promotion, and the mad scramble of life, that somehow magical rituals could cure them and prolong their miserable lives. (Like most people today)

Jesus was teaching that these values, and viewpoint is wrong.

The miracle

Jesus with his great wisdom saw the infirm man lying there, and knew he had been sick for 38 years. This man had no hope of getting into the pool because when the time came to go into the pool, everyone else rushed down, to get into the pool before him. Only one apparently was able to be healed (again showing the evident flaw in the tradition.)

The man lamented he had missed every opportunity for years and years. It was a hopeless case.

So why did he keep going there then?

He said *Sir, I have no man...* Clearly he lived in hope, that perhaps one day, someone would help him. Was not this supposed to be the House of Mercy? He was waiting for a Saviour. He had not given up on the mercy of God. But was always let down by the lack of mercy of fellow men. See Psalm 49:7. *None of them can by any means redeem his brother...* Sir, I have no man...

So the nation of Israel had no man to carry them, their leaders concerned only for their own welfare. A few scattered here and there had not given up hope though, and looked for the consolation of Israel. To these Jesus comes, and they hear his voice, waiting for their Redeemer.

38 years

Israel had been in this position before when a generation was wasted away. Deuteronomy 2:14 *And the space in which we came from Kadeshbarnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the Lord sware unto them.* 38 years was the length of time the generation of unbelievers wandered in the wilderness, who refused to believe in the saving name, and instead trusted in their own strength, only those who were of good courage were saved. 38 years a generation perished.

The contrast with this man, who hoped against hope. Hope in a faithful man is based on fact. This cripple knew his limitations, and knew there was no feasible means of a cure, but still he believed that God could heal him somehow. So the Apostle teaches us the value of True Hope. Romans 8: 24 *For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man sees, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.*

House of Mercy

The crippled man, knew he was totally dependant upon another who he hoped would someday show him Mercy. Is this not the very essence of our own faith, as we make our way to the deep still waters of the Word?

Our infirmities prevent us from the cure... but there is a Saviour, ... Romans 8: 26 *Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

The Lord Jesus, the true shepherd of the sheep, knows what it is like to have limitations, the feeling of desertion, to have no man to help the humiliation of this body of flesh: So with understanding, feeling and compassion, Jesus approached this sick man, and he asked him softly... *Will you be made whole?* The man explained he had no one to assist. Jesus did not lift up the man and take him down to the pool – Jesus did

not rely on the pool! – but rather Jesus chose another way, whereby he would show he could make a man every whit whole, (John 7:23) that is in everyway clean and pure, cleansed in every sense.

The power of the Word

Jesus spoke. The man believed. The man was healed. *Rise take up thy bed and walk.* Quiet, but direct from the Spirit, the still small voice in contrast to the madness of the rush to the strange beliefs, whereby people will believe anything but the Truth!

Many today still believe in tradition and ritual. Some believe that salvation comes by immersion into water. But baptism does save us, but not by the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but by the answer of a good conscience (1 Peter 3:21) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The traditions and rituals of men, believe that by being good people, by good works, it is enough, but all men are guilty before God. It is not enough.

No man can come unto the Father but by me, says our Saviour. The answer of a good conscience is only possible through understanding and appreciating our weak and failing characters. This understanding is only possible through the reading, and hearing of the Word. **Rise up and Walk.**

The healing waters that Jesus provides are far superior to Bethesda...

Christ also loved the Ecclesia, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

(Ephesians 5:27)

Brother Terry