

WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

Christ Church, Crouch End Hill

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No: 82

"The third of the signs" - Healing of a paralysed man at the pool.

Brief Talk on John 5: 1– 15

Read John 5: 1-15

Introduction

This is the third of the seven signs of John's Gospel. Verses 1-15 tell the story of the sign. The rest of chapter 5 from verse 16 records the controversy which it raised. On the human level what Jesus did and said that day cost Him His life. His enemies never forgave Him.

We are not told the nature of the disease that deprived this man of the power of walking. There had been a time when he walked as other men. No doubt when he first took sick his friends sent messages of sympathy, and visited him. But after 38 years had passed, the cruel sad fact of long illness took over. The visits and messages of friends became less and less frequent, until they forgot him altogether.

in John chapter 5, we see the conceit of an individual, the conceit of a people and yet the compassion of the Christ. In fact, what we see being worked out throughout the Gospel of John is the theme set out for us back in chapter 1: 10-12 where we read, 'He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him... In incident after incident we are presented with the person of Jesus - the Divine Son; the work of Jesus- the giver of life; and the response to Jesus- those who reject him and those who believe in him. And you know what? Those are exactly the same issues people are having to face today. How are we going to respond to Jesus? Because our answer to that question will determine our eternal destiny- whether we have 'life' or not. Well, let's see how this is worked out by that pool in Jerusalem on that hot Palestinian afternoon

Questions for discussion

1. How do you picture the setting of this story (vv.2-4)? What is the smell, the noises, the atmosphere? How would you feel in a place like this?
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Comment: Just try and imagine the scene. Here is a pool surrounded by five large porches, appropriately called 'Bethesda' - 'House of mercy', which is exactly what these people lying there are looking for. As far as the eye can see there are rows and rows of sick and disabled people. It is a picture of abject futility, pitiful in the extreme. And it is into this situation of desperate need and total misery that the Son of God walks. And you know, what he sees is a microcosm of what God sees everywhere as he looks upon our world. This physical manifestation of fallen, broken humanity is but a reflection of the deeper broken spiritual state of humanity, as we are all in the condition of those who are spiritually blind, crippled and infirmed, lost in a lost world.

2. How would you describe the invalid (vv. 5-7)
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3. What exceptional, worthy qualities commended this man to Jesus?
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4. Why did Jesus ask the question, "Do you want to get well?" in 5:6?
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Note: There was nothing about this man which particularly commended him to Jesus -there was nothing but his need. And when you think about it, that is exactly our natural state before God. You see, what we are faced with here is something of the mystery of God's electing love, a love which targets particular people. As we saw in that verse from the first chapter, if anyone is born again as a child of God it is not because of their will-a human decision, but God's. However, that does not mean that by focusing upon one individual Jesus is neglecting others. For what Jesus often does is to work in the life of one person in order to draw out faith in other people. Remember, he did that with the Samaritan woman with the result that the whole of her village came to believe. And so it is here.

- 5 (a) What can you deduce from the man's answer? (v.7). What did Jesus do? What does this third sign point to?
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6. As the invalid, what do you feel in verses 8-9, 10-12 and 13?
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7. What information do we have of the cause of this man's predicament (v.14)? Can we make a generalisation based on this statement of Jesus? (cf. John 9:1-3; Job 42:7-8)
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8. What can you say about the reaction of the Jewish leaders and the healed man's response?
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Conclusion:

This man by the poolside was friendless, and that ensured the friendship of Jesus. Indeed, one wonders why Jesus did not heal everybody around the pool that day. John reminds us again and again that Jesus came into the world for another purpose than merely performing signs and wonders. Still, it seems as though from time to time our Lord simply could not help Himself. His heart of compassion went out to the most needy and oftentimes, He disappeared immediately after the healing and did not wait around to take the credit. The lame man did not know, at first, who had spoken to him and who had healed him. I think that John is trying to tell us something deeper in this story about Jesus' "third sign." There are a lot of unanswered questions about this story, but John appears to have had another purpose in mind than merely relating the story of a miraculous healing. Do you suppose that the author is trying to tell us that no matter how long you have lived with your problems, no matter whether everyone else on earth has forsaken you, there is still One who will not forsake you, One who cares infinitely for you? I think that is the case.

Reflection

We are all so like this paralysed man at the pool. Sinful, unlovely "for all have sinned." We all need cleansing, healing, and new life. And here, plainly written in this third sign is His promise of forgiveness and new life. **Jesus Christ is the restorer of the powers we have lost because of sin.**

Before we pass from the significance of this third sign, we pause to Apply Jesus' command of verse 8 to ourselves:

"Rise"

While the man is telling Jesus that it is impossible to have his power to walk restored Jesus said "RISE". This was the very thing the paralysed man could not do. Jesus called him to do the impossible.

We are prone to think that sin has such a grip on us that nothing can help us. But Jesus did not come into this world to save us from the sins from which we can save ourselves. He came to enable us to do the impossible. We should not argue that our case is hopeless.

When we do what Jesus commands the energies of God become ours. When the man stood on his feet Jesus' next command was:

"Take up your bed" Why? To keep him from making any provision for a relapse. It means--make no provision for returning to your old life. Burn your bridges behind you. The only way to live a new life is to make a clean break with the old. The final command of Jesus was:

"Walk"--you have been carried long enough. You have complained about your lack of abilities and powers. You have complained for so long that the church hasn't done much to help you. Then "WALK", try carrying some of the load yourself. If things are not what they ought to be, then get on your own two feet and help to make things better. Throw away those crutches of excuses. Get busy doing something to put things right. Make what restitution you can. Open your life to Christ's power. Face up to your personal responsibilities. Begin by doing the duty that lies closest. If you and I will do just this we will find with the paralysed man at the pool that Jesus Christ is the restorer of lost powers.