

February 21st, 2016

# THE GLORY OF CHRIST IN COMPASSION AND CONFLICT

John 5:1-18

This is the third sign that Jesus performs in this book so far. The first sign we saw in 2:1-11 where Jesus turns the water into wine. The second sign is when Jesus healed the official's son last chapter. This the third sign when He heals a man who was crippled for 38 years. And as always in every sign, Jesus is aiming at the substance behind the sign: Himself. Jesus is going to use this sign to set up the rest of the chapter. Here's the flow of this chapter. He shows compassion on this man in v.1-9, and this creates a massive conflict with the Jews because it was done on the Sabbath in v.9-18, and then Jesus proclaims His glory and equality with the Father in the rest of the chapter. So there's a progression to this chapter: compassion, conflict, and then a proclamation of glory.

The Big Idea...compassion and conflict are theaters for Christ's glory

☆ The Glory of Christ in Compassion (v.1-9a)

☆ The Glory of Christ in Conflict (v.9b-18)

## I. The Glory of Christ in Compassion (v.1-9a)

### 1. Physical invalids

Our text begins with Jesus going to Jerusalem to observe a feast of the Jews. We don't know which feast it is, but the original intent behind all the feasts was to celebrate some wondrous work of God. So Jesus wanting to

celebrate the glory of His Father goes. Once there, he arrives at this pool near the sheep gate,<sup>1</sup> called Bethesda.<sup>2</sup>

v. 3 In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.

So put this in your mind's eye. Jesus approaches this stone pool in the religious center of the world and what does He see? A multitude of crippled and broken and desperate people. Some lying on mats on the ground, others hobbling around on crutches, others being led by the hand because of their blindness. It was a sight of hopelessness. The blind, the lame, and the paralyzed all gathered in one place, all hoping for some remedy to heal them.

## **2. Spiritual invalids**

This is a picture of us. All of us are invalids, not in the physical sense, but much worse in the spiritual sense. We are spiritual invalids, apart from Jesus Christ. All of us are crippled and lame blind to the glory and compassion of Jesus Christ. This story is not some random event in the life of Jesus, but is a sign of our desperate and hopeless condition until Jesus comes on the scene. Any soul, apart from Jesus Christ, is in a worse condition than the bodies of these persons. These persons suffer physically because of their sicknesses, but spiritual invalids have eternal condemnation hanging over them. Separated from God by sin. Alienated from God by rebellion. At enmity from God because of iniquity. Always growing older, passing from one day to the next, always one step closer to standing before the judgment seat of God.

## **3. The waters of the world vs. the water of Jesus**

What these invalids were hoping for was healing from this pool. They hung their lives on it. They all gathered at these waters, because it was thought that these waters brought healing. They were looking to a means

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<sup>1</sup> Presumably where the animals come in to be used in temple sacrifice.

<sup>2</sup> Translated "house of outpouring"—D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), pg. 241; OR 'house of mercy'—ESV Study Bible, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2008), pg. 2030

that would not heal them of their greatest problem. And we all too often do the same. Jesus had already declared to the woman at the well the utter insufficiency of the water of this world. **John 4:13-14** “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” What superficial cures do we seek after as they did? They sought after the stirring of the waters.<sup>3</sup> What stirrings do we seek after? Who is our functional savior? Our job? Our reputation? Our bank account? Our acts of kindness? Do we think that *mere* Bible reading will heal us from that which plagues our souls? Do we think that if we *simply* come to church where there is a stirring of the waters, that that alone will cure us? These are all means. They are not Christ. If we don’t come to Christ in our Bible reading, if we don’t come to Christ in our prayers, if we don’t come to Christ in baptism, if we don’t come to Christ in the preaching of the Word, we are simply doing the same thing these invalids did. There are a thousand different pools that we can seek after in order to find a cure for the disease of our soul, all the while Jesus Christ alone offers the water that we need.

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<sup>3</sup> If you look down at your Bibles, you will notice if you have an ESV that v.4 is missing. In fact older translations like the KJV have an additional part of v.3 added as well as v.4. The ESV footnote will provide the “missing verse” Starting in v.3 “In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed, *waiting for the moving of the water; for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred the water: whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had.*” It’s not included in the ESV because the oldest manuscripts do not have this verse.<sup>4</sup> Many scholars believe that this was a marginal note that a copyist at one point inserted into the text itself.<sup>5</sup> The man that Jesus speaks to, certainly believed that something like this event took place as we see in v.7. Yet what neither what he personally believes, nor is this questionable event essential to our story. This story is not about whether the angel of the Lord disturbed the waters or not, or whether or not v.4 should be included or not. Rather what is essential to this story is the displaying of Jesus Christ. So let’s look at what happens next.

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John Piper notes on the missing verse: “There are thousands of Greek manuscripts or fragments of Greek manuscripts and the way we arrive at our amazingly reliable Greek and Hebrew and English versions is that these texts are compared with each other in painstaking and complex ways so that when some manuscripts have different wording, we can tell almost all the time which is original. And in the few places where we can’t, there is no significant historical or doctrinal issue at stake.” <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/healed-for-the-sake-of-holiness> (accessed February 19th, 2016)

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D.A. Carson reports that “There is no other attestation of this belief in sources roughly contemporaneous with Jesus” *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI,: Eerdmans Publishing Co.,1991), pg. 243

#### 4. 38 years of misery and one moment of Sovereign Grace

v.5 One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

I would say that this man was probably the most desperate person out of everyone there. Think of it, he was sick longer than many people's life expectancy at that time.<sup>4</sup> He was miserably crippled for thirty-eight long years. And yet his spiritual condition was worse than his physical condition. This man was an unbeliever. We know this from the way that Jesus speaks to him in v.14.

#### 5. "Do you want to be healed?"

v.6 When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?"

Notice **first** of all, that Jesus *knew* of his condition. He *knew* that this man had been in this state a long time. How did Jesus know this? Why is this significant? Because Jesus is God. **John 1:1** "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."<sup>5</sup> As God, Jesus knew all of his comings and goings. He knew every word on his tongue and every thought in his head. And he knew of his misery.

**Secondly** notice that Jesus only went to him. v.3 tells us that there was "...a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed." And yet Jesus only goes to this one man. He did not come to heal *all*. Why? Two reasons:

1) **Jesus is free.** His compassion to us is not owed. Christ's compassion springs from free grace. All the invalids by that pool were sinners. Just like all the people in this city are sinners. And Christ does not owe mercy to sinners. He owes judgment to sinners. Death row inmates do not deserve pardon, and neither do crippled sinners. But He exercises His sovereign

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<sup>4</sup> ESV Study Bible, (Wheaton, IL,: Crossway, 2008), pg. 2030

<sup>5</sup> It is this God, Jesus who tells us in **Exodus 4:11** "Then the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" It is Christ's ordering of all things, that this man was in the condition that He was in.

choice in picking out this man. This was why He came to the pool Bethesda. To have a sovereign appointment with this crippled sinner and to show the extravagance of His mercy.

**2) Healing was not the main issue.** Healing is only a sign. This man died at the end of his life. The healing didn't prevent that. The healing was a sign. And Jesus' main mission was not *merely* to perform signs, but to display Himself as the substance of the signs.<sup>6</sup> I believe the reason that Jesus didn't heal everyone was because He didn't want people to see the healing as an end in itself, but rather to point to Him as the great Physician of the soul. This event is about displaying Christ and His ability to save the soul and not just heal the body. That is a greater display of Himself that He is aiming at.

**Thirdly**, Jesus asks the man “Do you want to be healed?” To me, the answer to this question is so obvious. ‘Of course I want to be healed! That’s why I’m here. That’s why I come year after year.’ So why would Jesus ask this? **Because Jesus wasn’t talking about mere physical healing.** “Do you want your soul to be healed? Do you want true healing?” The answer to this question is not so obvious. Many people around that pool wanted physical healing, and even would have wanted heaven. But they didn’t want Jesus. This is the irony of the unconverted heart. The unconverted heart wants healing, it wants the happiness of heaven. But the unconverted heart doesn’t want the Christ of heaven. The unconverted heart doesn’t see Jesus as lovely and worthy of worship. Worthy of losing everything in order to gain Christ. That’s what true healing is, gaining Christ, loving Christ, being united to Christ. The man totally misses the deeper meaning of what Jesus is saying.

v. 7 The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.”

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<sup>6</sup> Throughout this gospel, this issue of signs and substance is always being confused by those around Jesus. We will see this in the next chapter. After the *sign* of feeding the five thousand, the multitude seeks Jesus out, and he says to them in John 6:26 “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” In other words, they didn’t see the bread as pointing to Jesus as the bread of life, they only saw the bread as a means to fill their stomachs.

Jesus is going to use this confession anyway, and He will come back to correct him later regarding the true healing He was speaking about. But this man's answer was still profound for Jesus' purposes. So how does he answer? 1) "The pool is my functional savior. That is what I have put my hope in. And time again this savior has failed me. Time and again this savior has left me desperate." 2) "Nobody will help me, and I am unable to do it myself." He was speaking of physical healing, but the deeper meaning is more important. Nobody can help you with the true healing you need. Children, your parents can not bring you into a relationship with Christ. They are powerless to cause your soul to be made right with God. And so are you. Just like this man was crippled and powerless to heal himself, so are you. Nobody on planet earth can be healed from their sin apart from the grace of Jesus Christ. And so this man's confession of his own failing savior, puts the real Savior on display. The powerlessness of this man puts Jesus' power on display. The crowd's indifference toward the man puts Jesus' compassion on display. Jesus asks the question "Do you want to be healed" in order to emphasize the invincible truth that there is no Savior but Christ. There is no healer but Christ. There is no one truly compassionate except for Christ. With that confession, Jesus immediately says to him in...

v. 8 ... "Get up, take up your bed, and walk."

Immediately crippled and atrophied muscles become young and strong. Hollowed out bones are given life-giving marrow. Failing organs are stripped of their diseases and become fully functioning. Omnipotence destroys impotence. "And at once [v.9 says] the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked." 38 years of crippling disease is nothing to Jesus Christ. Neither is 38 years of a sinful life, or 78 years of a sinful life for that matter. No amount of sin can stop Christ from healing you. It's one command from His mouth, and He turns sinners into saints. He turns haters of God into lovers of God. With one sentence Jesus shows His absolute compassion on ruined sinners. But He is up to more.

## II. The Glory of Christ in Conflict (v.9b-18)

## 1. Going beyond what is written

v. 9b Now that day was the Sabbath.

Out of all the days of the week to heal people, Jesus chose the Sabbath. On purpose. He came to heal to the pool of Bethesda on purpose, to find this man on purpose, and to heal on the Sabbath on purpose. And He knew this would cause a conflict.

v.10 So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.”

The Jews had taken the good Sabbath command that God gave us for rest and enjoyment of Him, and formulated their own traditions concerning it. According to their writings, specifically Mishnah, they came up with a thirty-nine classes of work that were prohibited on the Sabbath.<sup>7</sup> One of which including carrying something from one place to another. The observant Jew might point to Jeremiah 17:21-22 as justification for this interpretation “Thus says the LORD: Take care for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers.” Jesus would have taught that this command ought to have been kept but not the way the Jew interpreted it. The Sabbath is meant to be a day where we receive from God, and rest in Him. God fashioned the world with His fingers in 6 days. And then He called it very good and set apart the 7th day so that mankind could stop and admire His work. Worldly employments are meant to be rested from so that all our senses and all our mental faculties could be free to meditate and consider and worship over the mighty works of God. And this is all the more true in the NT. The OT saints meditated on God’s works of creation, but we in the NT get to meditate on God’s works of redemption. The crucified, buried and risen Savior of the world. God gives us a day each week where we can feast with our souls on the inexpressible gift of Jesus

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<sup>7</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), pg. 244

Christ. And then He promises in Isaiah that when if we delight in God on His day, that He will “..make [us] ride on the heights of the earth; [that He] will feed [us] with the heritage of Jacob [our] father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” (Isaiah 58:13).

The Jews, ironically, turned it into a day of delighting in their own works, specifically, the extra-Biblical traditions of prohibiting true works of God. But we’ll see more of the Sabbath later on in this book. That’s not the main point of this text.

The thing that should most strike us in v.10 is the fact that the Jews completely put aside the fact that this man was healed. This man was a cripple for 38 years, and in their hardness of heart, they put aside his miraculous healing and in order to focus on their extra-biblical interpretations. A miracle was in front of them, evidence that the Messiah had come, and they were totally missing it.<sup>8</sup> Instead they interrogate the healed man.

## 2. The man blames Jesus

In this interrogation, we see this healed man buckling under the pressure. And he offers a very different response than the healed man in John 9. That man defended Christ as a prophet sent from God (John 9:16-17) But this man who was sick for 38 years shifts the blame from himself onto Jesus.

v.11 But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’”

To this the Jews respond in v.12

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<sup>8</sup> Brothers and sisters, beware of the danger of going beyond what the Scripture says. It always produces an envious and hard heart and makes us blind to the glory of Jesus Christ. These Jews were blind to the very Messiah that they professed to wait for. In their tradition, they went beyond Scripture, and this is never without consequence. Both liberals and legalists add to the law in their own unique way, and they are most blind to the Christ of compassion that they profess with their lips. But this always starts in small incremental ways. In our own hearts, we are warring legalists, and indulgent liberals. And these monsters come out in conflicts. **Wherever there is conflict, there is always a going beyond what the Scripture says, either on the part of one party or the other or both.** And this always hardens the heart. And this always abuses our neighbor. And this always obscures the glory of Christ. Are you at conflict with anybody? Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart, to see if you are going beyond the Scripture.



v.12 They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’”

At this point the Jews become more enraged at the Person who gave the command. Obviously the Person who gave the command posed a greater threat to their power than this former cripple. Yet the man didn’t know who Jesus was because he had withdrawn Himself in the crowd (v.13) And this is a curious thing: **why did Jesus withdraw Himself?** Remember that there was a multitude of invalids there, and were Jesus to stick around, the crowd would have flocked to Him. But physical healing was not the main thing that Jesus was after in this place. We see this from v.14 where Jesus comes back to the man.

## **2. Repent, or something worse will happen**

v.14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.”

Jesus now approaches the man to reveal His truest intentions. ‘Look I made your body well. But there is more. Stop your rebellion. Lay down your arms. Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.’ What worse thing could happen to this man than what he has already suffered? Hell. Eternal punishment. Not for simply sinning, that’s not Jesus’ meaning, but for continuing to reject Him. This man was not yet a believer. He had not closed with Christ. Jesus is now bringing to his attention the true meaning of what He asked before “Do you want to be healed?” ‘Your physical healing is only a sign of what you need in your soul. Your previous misery is only a sign of what is to come if you do not put your hope in Me.’ This man no longer needed the functional savior of the pool, but had not yet turned to Christ as his Savior. His answer to the question thus far was: ‘No I don’t want to be healed.’ That is the answer of all who don’t hope in Christ. ‘I don’t want healing, because I don’t love the Healer.’ And so Jesus gives the man this warning. And we don’t know what happens to this man.

## **3. I am working because My Father is working**

v.15-17 The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

After the Jews learned that it was Jesus who both healed the man and commanded him to take up his mat, they instantly turn to persecuting him for breaking the Sabbath. But instead of correcting their wrong view of what can and can't be done on the Sabbath, Jesus simply says “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” We must ask: how can it be said that the Father is working until now, when Genesis 2:2 says that He rested on the seventh day? Jesus' implication is that God never rested. Jesus is right. God did rest from the works of creation, but not from the works of providence. If God were to stop upholding the universe on the Sabbath day, the universe would have ceased to exist on the first Sabbath **Psalm 104:29** “When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to dust.” The greatest evidence that God is still working today, is that we are not dust. The Jews would have agreed to this. But it's the second part that brings the persecution. He says “...and I am working.” What is the implication of that statement? The implication is exactly what the Jews conclude in the next verse.

v.18 This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

The Jew' persecution of Jesus boiled over into murderous intent because they heard Him to say that He was equal with God. The ancient heresy of Arianism and it's counterparts today in Mormonism, and Jehovah's Witnessism, and any other *ism* that denies the full deity of Jesus Christ must dismiss this verse. They suppose that the Jews misunderstood the meaning of Jesus' words. That they may a wrong conclusion that Jesus didn't intend. But Jesus lets this stand. He doesn't try to correct them by saying, ‘That's not what I meant, you're taking it wrong.’ In fact He does the opposite. He reinforces their conclusion in the discourse that follows v.19-29. Look at v. 19 “For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.” ‘My Father

created the world, I created the world...My Father called Abraham out of Babylon and created the Jewish nation, I called Abraham out of Babylon and created the Jewish nation. I do whatever My Father is doing, and since He is working, I am working. I worked that miracle on that man, specifically so you could see who I AM. **I AM God.** I created this Sabbath conflict in your midst so that you could see plainly who I AM.<sup>9</sup> In one act, the glory of Jesus Christ is on display in front of us. In one act of compassion and one act of conflict, Jesus proclaims that He is God

## Application

Our Doctrine: Compassion and conflict are theaters for Christ's glory

Our Duty: "Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."

Jesus asked this man a question: "Do you want to be healed?" No doubt he wanted physical healing but he didn't really want Jesus. The unconverted heart sees loving Jesus Christ as optional at best, and repulsive at worst. The unconverted heart will take the blessings of Jesus, but not Jesus Himself. Unconverted man, unconverted woman, unconverted child: Do you want to be healed? That's what Jesus is asking you today: Do you

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<sup>9</sup>How do we reconcile this truth with what Jesus says later in John 14:28 "the Father is greater than I"? How can Jesus be equal to the Father, but the Father be greater than Jesus at the same time? Well Jesus is equal to the Father in His **deity** "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the **Word was God**" (John 1:1). But in His **humanity**, the Father is greater, "And the **Word became flesh** and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). In His glory and honor and substance, Jesus is equal to the Father "Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him."(John 5:23) But in His role as the Son, and in the part He plays in redemption, the Father is greater because the Father is the sender the Son is the one sent: "For God so loved the world, that **He gave** His only Son..." (John 3:16)

want to be healed? In your soul? Jesus warns all those who brush aside this question with his final statement to the man: “Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” You never know when your last day is. Every day, thousands of people step into eternity to meet God at the judgment seat. You don’t know when your last day is. Have you trusted in Christ? If not, turn to Him, hope in Him. Today is the day of salvation. Jesus promises that something far worse is waiting for those who don’t turn to Him. Jesus speaks of this later in this chapter. “for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” (John 5:28-29) There are so many uncertain things in this life, but what is certain is the final judgment when Christ will everlastingly seal the eternal state of all people. “Do you want to be healed?”

**Our Delight:** Jesus doesn’t wait for us to be whole to come to us

The most delightful thing about this text is how Jesus comes to the man. The man was an unbeliever. His life was utterly ruined with sickness. He wasn’t seeking Jesus. But Jesus Christ in His Sovereign Grace comes to Him. Freely. Just as He came to the woman at Samaria. He is the initiator. He seeks this man out of the crowd. He speaks to Him. And this is how Christ came to us. Jesus seeks us out of the crowd of lost souls and speaks to our hearts. He didn’t wait for us to come to Him. We couldn’t. We were blind, and paralyzed and didn’t want His healing. But He came to us. He came to us though we gave Him every reason not to. Christ sought us out, because it His food to do the Father’s will. (John 4:34). Jesus is hungry to show compassion. Jesus was hungry to heal us. And that is why we are here right now. We sit in the assembly of the saints and we worship with our brothers and sisters around the world, and with the saints and angels in heaven because Jesus spoke to our souls: “Get up, take up your bed, and walk!” And our souls came alive to Him. Jesus healed us though we resisted Him. Jesus made us whole, while we would rather wallow in misery. Jesus gave us life, though we would rather have death. Jesus gave us new hearts to love Him, though we were contented with old hearts that hated Him. Oh the compassion of Christ!