

John 5: 1-16

You might recall, that in our last lesson, something seemed to be irritating Jesus.

He had just left Samaria after two glorious days of ministry.

During that time, the people had gladly received Him as the Messiah, for, you see, they were partly Jewish and partly Gentile.

However, He must leave, for He needed to return to the **"lost sheep of the house of Israel."**

Certainly, He had no thought of abandoning God's Chosen People, for He was their promised Messiah.

However, their lack of response concerning His miracles and the other witnesses that God had supplied contrasted sharply with the simple faith of the Samaritans.

His miracles had been designed for Israel, with the specific purpose of leading them to their Messiah.

But, in spite of everything, they continued to look upon Him as a prophet, or even as a deceiver.

In stark contrast to this, the Samaritans, who hadn't seen a single miracle, **"said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."**

Did you hear that? --- **"the Christ"**, which means the Messiah, and not only that, but **"the Saviour of the world."**

Jesus would never receive that kind of recognition from Israel.

So, as He trudged down the dusty road to Galilee, I'm sure their lack of faith was much upon His mind.

Oh, there was no word of complaint, and we wouldn't have had a clue what He was thinking had not the Holy Spirit chosen to insert a statement--that Jesus had made on a previous occasion--right here in the middle of this text.

Please turn to John 4:43-44 **"Now after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee.**

44: For Jesus himself testified, that a

**prophet hath no honour in his own
country."**

Do you know when He actually spoke those
words?

Well, I'm not sure which visit it was, but
it was one of the times when He was in
His own home town in Galilee.

Yes, as Jesus walked away from those two
wonderful days with the Samaritans, I
believe Israel's callous unbelief, and
particularly that of the Galileans, was
much upon His mind.

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Well, His initial reception wasn't all that
bad, as some of the Galileans had been
up to the feast at Jerusalem, and had
recently seen His miracles.

However, it wasn't long before He was brought face to face with their lack of faith, this time by a single man.

A nobleman came to him in great distress, and was determined that Jesus would come to his house, even though it was about 15 miles away, and lay His hands on his sick son. --- **"Sir, come down ere my child die."**

This was in sharp contrast to the behaviour of the Roman Centurion who had been perfectly content to let Jesus heal by, what you might call, remote control --- **"speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed."**

Yes, I think the nobleman's lack of faith was the last straw, for Jesus responded, **"Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe."**

Jesus had no intention of ignoring the man's need, but He was going to handle it His own way --- **"Go thy way; thy son liveth."**

No, Jesus was much more than a Jewish prophet, He could **"speak the word only"** and the man's son would be healed.

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Unbelief has always been a serious problem. It kept Israel out of the Promised Land for 40 years, and it would postpone their kingdom for more than 2000.

And, as you might have already guessed, it was a constant source of grief to their Messiah.

In fact, it was the Gentiles, not the Israelites, that warmed Jesus' heart with their faith.

No, it wasn't God's people that **"besought him that he would tarry with them;"** it was the Samaritans, a people that had never witnessed any single miracle.

Also, it was a *Roman* centurion that had amazed Jesus by his faith, and solicited these words from His lips, --
- **"Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."**

And it was a Gentile to whom He said --- **"O woman, great is thy faith."**

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So the bottom line is this.

Jesus loves those who have faith in Him, and is irritated by those who don't trust Him.

And this is also true of His Heavenly Father.

Remember God's response at the burning bush. As a baby, Moses had been miraculously saved from destruction.

And then he had been given the best education that Egypt could provide.

Yes, Moses was God's long-range plan to deliver Israel.

However, when God gave him his commission, including special signs and wonders, he was full of excuses.

"O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue."

Was this lack of eloquence really such a problem?

Moses thought it was.

In his opinion, his inabilities outweighed God's abilities.

And did that irritate God?

You bet it did!

**"And the anger of the LORD was kindled
against Moses, and he said, Is not
Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know
that he can speak well."**

So God gave him Aaron, who turned out to be
a pain in the neck.

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And was God angry when Israel refused to go
into the Promised Land?

He certainly was!

Numbers 14:11 **"And the LORD said unto Moses,
How long will this people provoke me?
and how long will it be ere they
believe me, for all the signs which I
have shewed among them?"**

Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

In fact, it sounds a lot like His Son's words when Israel refused to recognize Him as their Messiah --- **"Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes."**

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I can't get into it now, but the book of Hebrews makes a definite connection between Israel's lack of faith that kept them out of the Promised Land, and the Christian's lack of faith that prevents him from living a victorious life in Christ.

Certainly, the Promised Land is a type of heaven, but it is also a type of the victorious life in Christ.

In both cases, be it Israel or the individual Christian, the culprit is always a lack of faith.

Now, God hadn't expected those Hebrew slaves to instantly become soldiers and conquer the land.

No, they needed some time in the wilderness, but not 40 years.

In like manner, God doesn't expect the new believer to instantly become a soldier of Jesus Christ, but He does expect progress.

So, does our lack of faith grieve Him, even anger Him?

I believe it does.

No, we weren't made to be wilderness

Christians; we were made to be soldiers
of Jesus Christ.

1 John 5: 4-5 **"For whatsoever is born of God
overcometh the world: and this is the
victory that overcometh the world, even
our faith.**

**5: Who is he that overcometh the world,
but he that believeth that Jesus is the
Son of God?"**

So-o-o, when we tiptoe through life with no
more authority than the cocker spaniel,
does that irritate God?

You bet it does!

So, let's not make the same mistake that
Moses did.

Don't allow our inabilities to overshadow
God's abilities.

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I'm sure many of you have heard about the dynamic preacher by the name of Chuck Swindoll.

You wouldn't call him a man of slow speech, would you?

Did you know that as a child, he had a terrible problem with stuttering?

Obviously, a little boy with **a slow tongue** wasn't any problem to God.

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Well, we must get back to our lesson.

As we enter chapter 5, Jesus had left Galilee, and was making the long trek to Judea.

As far as the Gospel of John records, Jesus had only performed one miracle, namely, the healing of the nobleman's son, during His time in Galilee.

Obviously, their unbelief had hindered His ministry.

I wonder how many times my unbelief has hindered the Lord's work?

I don't even like to think about it!

Yes, it's hard, even impossible, for Jesus to accomplish the extraordinary in an atmosphere of unbelief. So now, after performing a single miracle, He was on His way to Judea.

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John 5:1-9 **"After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**

2: Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches.

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.

5: And a certain man was there, which
had an infirmity thirty and eight
years.

6: When Jesus saw him lie, and knew
that he had been now a long time in
that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou
be made whole?

7: The impotent man answered him, Sir,
I have no man, when the water is
troubled, to put me into the pool: but

while I am coming, another steppeth
down before me.

8: Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up
thy bed, and walk.

9: And immediately the man was made
whole, and took up his bed, and walked:
and on the same day was the sabbath."

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Going back to V 1: **"After this there was a
feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to
Jerusalem."**

I wonder why the Holy Spirit referred to
this occasion as **"a feast of the Jews."**
Certainly, like all of the other feasts that
Israel observed, this should have been
God's feast, but over the years they
had lost something, and, apparently,
they hadn't even noticed.

And there is something else that is unusual here.

In spite of the fact that this was a very important religious feast, as yet, Jesus had not attended.

And you know what? There are a lot of religious activities that Jesus doesn't attend, and, in many cases, He isn't even missed.

So where was He?

V 2 **"Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches."**

And that's where Jesus was going.

He was heading down to a smelly sheep market, and beyond that to a pool called Bethesda.

And since there were many sick folk lying beside that pool, I don't think it would smell too good either.

Bethesda means "house of mercy," which is an appropriate name for a pool where people were getting healed.

However, not everyone was getting healed, for V 5 says **"--- a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years."**

Now, we shouldn't automatically assume that this man had been there for the entire 38 years.

He could have been, but not necessarily.

No, we don't really know whether Bethesda had been his first choice or his last resort.

However, we do know that 38 years is a long time, and no doubt much of it had been spent at that pool.

So, even though it had been a "house of mercy" for many, for this man, after years of blasted dreams, it had become a house of hopelessness.

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Illustrations are a great help in teaching a lesson.

They can come from your own experience, the experience of others, or can even be taken from your own imagination.

Today I would like to imagine what it would be like to be this man.

What I am going to say now is not from Scripture.

Everything we really know about this man is contained in V 2-9, which we have just read.

So, I want to make it very clear that I'm not adding to Scripture, simply creating an illustration that I hope will be helpful.

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I wonder what this man had been thinking about, even dreaming about, during those hopeless years?

The Holy Spirit hasn't given us his name, and no doubt there's a good reason for that.

However, for the purpose of this illustration, why not give him a name? No doubt he was Jewish, so we'll give him a good Bible name, like Abel.

And to bring things right up to date, let's
nickname him Abe.

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So, what was the exact nature of Abe's
infirmity?

Well, Scripture doesn't tell us.

Perhaps he was crippled, or simply very
weak.

Whatever his condition, he couldn't move
about quickly.

Maybe he couldn't even walk.

So what was the basic requirement to be
healed?

You had to run *faster* than everyone else.

Now, if that isn't a hopeless situation, I
don't know what is!

And might I add at this point, this poor man
without the strength to appropriate
God's blessing, is a perfect picture of

the Israelite under Old Testament Law -
--- **"by the deeds of the law there
shall no flesh be justified in his
sight ---."**

Yes, he had come to the "house of mercy,"
and mercy was available, but it was
first come first serve. --- **"Whosoever
then first after the troubling of the
water stepped in was made whole of
whatsoever disease he had."**

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I'm sure Abe would have done his very best
to stay right by the water, but you
couldn't be there all the time.

He had to get his food, and, of course,
there were other necessities of life.

No, he couldn't be Johnny-on-the-spot all
the time.

So the bottom line was this.

He had to be faster than anyone else, and,
of course, that was an utter
impossibility!

But there was another way, and I'm sure Abe
had thought of it, even dreamed about
it many times.

If someone would only *help him*, he might be
able to make it.

You see, you didn't have to be a miracle
worker to help Abe, just able-bodied,
and, of course determined.

Or should I say, committed.

You see, there would be those smells to
contend with.

The unpleasantness of sweaty and very
unhealthy people all around you, and it
could take weeks, even months.

Oh yes, you would have to be committed.

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So over the years, Abe dreamed about a helper. You know, a man like his old friend Andrew.

Oh, I haven't told you about Andrew, have I? Well, Andrew had sat right beside Abe for many years, during which time they had become good friends.

But Andrew was gone.

He had been healed of his infirmity, and he never looked back.

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Abe often thought about Andrew.

And many nights, after another hot and fruitless day, Abe would fall asleep dreaming about Andrew. *Oh, I wish Andrew was here!*

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-----*Hey Abe, it's your old buddy Andrew.*

*You remember me; I'm the guy with the
withered arm who used to sit next to
you. Oh, I still remember the
wonderful day 5 years ago, when I got
healed!*

*I just happened to be looking at the water
at the right time, and boy did I run!
It was the happiest day of my life ----- at
least it was, until I looked back and
saw your face.*

*I knew you had been losing races for years,
and now I had beaten you by a foot, or
should I say two feet.*

No, I never forgot that look!

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*Well I'm back --- and we're going to get you
into that pool!*

*I don't care how long it takes; I'm used to
this place.*

*I'll get your food, and I'll help you in.
If we don't make it the first time, we'll
make it the second.*

*You'll be first into the pool if I have to
throw you in myself -----*

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And then Abe woke up; and there was no
Andrew!

In fact, there was no man except the lame
and the blind and the paralyzed.

Why am I hanging around here anyway?!!

*I'm tired of being a loser, and I'm tired of
this hopelessness!*

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But Abe wasn't hopeless.

You see, about five years after he had
become ill, something wonderful
happened.

The Son of God left the ivory palaces of heaven and began a very long journey, a journey that would begin in Bethlehem, and finally direct His feet through a sheep market where they would stop beside a lost sheep --- **"Wilt thou be made whole?"**

Abe heard the voice, but I don't think he even looked up.

He was so far down that he couldn't see past the man's sandals.

*There's no use talking about being **"made whole"** --- **"Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool!"***

For years he had been inches away from the mercy of God, and he had missed it every time!

No, there was just no way of getting there.

At least, there was no way of getting there
first.

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But the rules had suddenly changed!
He didn't have to get there first anymore,
because the mercy of God had come to
him.

"Rise, take up thy bed, and walk."

And this time it wasn't a dream!

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It must have been a wonderful day when Abe
finally walked away from Bethesda.
And I don't think he ever looked back.
But you know what?
There's another kind of **"impotent folk,"** and
they're all around us.
And they're not just the poor souls we see
shuffling down our city streets wh
certainly do need our help.

No, there's the so-called respectable
cripples, that we rub shoulders with
every day.

They need Christ, too.

Yes, be they rich or poor, at the top or
bottom of society, if they don't have
Christ, they're "**impotent folk**," and
they're labouring under a burden of
sin.

And many of them will never make it to
Christ without our help, for they sit
where Abe sat.

They know they have a need, but the very sin
that separates them from God, keeps
them from "the house of mercy."

Yes, there's still a need for Andrews ---
Andrews, who are willing to spend the
time and effort necessary to help these
"impotent folk" to Jesus.

And you don't have to be a miracle worker
either.

Like Abe's friend, you only need to have
experienced God's grace yourself, and
then be willing to get involved.

Yes, people need a little help, even a lot
of help.

For without an Andrew, they will live and
die just outside "the house of mercy."

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Well, as wonderful as it was, Jesus' miracle
really raised the ire of the Jews.

They hadn't been eyewitnesses of the event,
for I'm sure they didn't spend much
time at the pool.

After all, it really wasn't their kind of a
place.

However, they just happen to see the
impotent man walking down the street,
carrying his bed roll on the Sabbath!

V 10 **"The Jews therefore said unto him that
was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is
not lawful for thee to carry thy bed."**

He could have been in a lot of trouble, but,
fortunately, he managed to pass the
buck.

V 11-12 **"He answered them, He that made me
whole, the same said unto me, Take up
thy bed, and walk.**

**12: Then asked they him, What man is
that which said unto thee, Take up thy
bed, and walk?"**

Isn't *selective hearing* wonderful?

They completely missed the words, **"He that
made me whole,"** but never missed a

syllable of the words, "**the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk.**"

No, it wasn't important that he was walking for the first time in 38 years. The only thing that mattered was the fact that he was carrying his bed on the Sabbath.

V 13 "**And he that was healed wist not** (or knew not) **who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place.**"

Perhaps the man had been so cast down when Jesus first met him that he hadn't even looked up, or, more than likely, he had never met Him before.

And since Jesus had "**conveyed himself away**" in the crowd, he didn't honestly know who had healed him.

V 14-15 "Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.

15: The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole."

I've always been disappointed with this man for turning Jesus in.

Oh, I know it would be dangerous to hold back information, but what about his gratitude?

Certainly, you couldn't blame him for wanting to know who his benefactor was, and it wouldn't be hard to identify Jesus at the temple, for everyone knew Him there.

But why did he have to go to the Jews?

They already knew the answer, for there was only one man who could have cured a person who had been crippled for 38 years.

No, they didn't need to know His identity. They were just looking for a witness against Him.

V 16 **"And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day."**

However, Jesus wasn't trying to avoid them, and when they caught up with Him, He didn't back down one inch.

Actually, you wouldn't believe what He told them!

In so many words, Jesus said it was perfectly all right for Him to heal on the Sabbath.

And why was He the grand exception?

We'll have to wait until next week to find
that out.

But I can tell you something right now.

When He told them, their blood pressure went
right through the roof!