



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

God's Ways Are Not Our Ways - Part 1 (John 5:1-9)

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I recently heard a pastor refer to “My Way”, the song made famous by Frank Sinatra. The lyrics reveal the final words of someone looking back on how they lived their life. The second stanza says, “Regrets, I’ve had a few/ But then again, too few to mention/ I did what I had to do and saw it through without exception/ I planned each charted course, each careful step along the byway/ And more, much more than this, I did it my way.”

This song is a monument to the self-made person who needs no counsel, plans or standards outside of himself. Since the beginning of time, people have adopted this philosophy of decision-making. Adam and Eve started it off and every descendant of theirs has naturally tried to make their own way in the world.

The saddest lyrics in the song come at the end: “For what is man, what has he got?/ If not himself, then he has naught/ To say the things he truly feels and not the words of one who kneels/ The record shows I took the blows and did it my way!”

As we watch Jesus in this week’s study, we see Him encounter a man who limited himself to a single plan, unaware that the Creator of the universe stood before him, ready and able to work a miracle in his life. His way was not the way that was expected.

I THE UNHEALTHY CROWD (5:1-5)

John 5:1-5 — After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, [waiting for the moving of the waters; for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.] A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.

Humanity is broken. Walk down any street, go to the mall, go anywhere people gather and you see the effects of a sinful, fallen world. Disease, sickness, birth defects, old age and handicaps of all kinds are easy to detect. But you will also see healthy people

(outwardly) who still suffer an inner ailment, just like everyone else. We are all born dead in sins, according to Ephesians 2:1. That’s the common malady of every person and causes the brokenness in our world. No one is immune.

Jesus stepped into the stream of time when physical and mental illnesses were commonplace and mostly incurable. Imagine the scene as He walked among the crowd of such needy and helpless people. How unpleasant the sights, sounds and smells must have been. But this is where we often see Christ – going to the hopeless, not to give clichés, but to change them forever.

The pool Jesus walked by was called Bethesda (“house of outpouring” or “house of mercy”). The sick were gathered there because of the healing properties of the waters. The bracketed part of the passage is not found in any Greek manuscripts before 400 A.D. so it was probably added by scribes to give some background to the story and describe what people believed at that time. The superstition was that the pool was stirred by an angel at certain times and the first person to enter the water would be healed.

Intermittent springs may have fed the pool and caused the disturbance of the water (v.7). Some ancient witnesses indicate that the waters of the pool were red with minerals, and thus thought to have medicinal value.¹

We are told about one man in this mix of suffering humanity who Jesus chose to minister to.

II. THE UNSELFISH QUESTION (5:6)

John 5:6 - When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, "Do you wish to get well?"

John again underscores the divinity of Christ, who knew this man’s condition without being told.

This man’s sickness appears to have been paralysis resulting in inability to walk at least (v. 7) that seems to have been a result of sin (v. 14). Perhaps a severe arthritic condition complicated his ailment. John’s reference to the length of his illness seems to be just to document its seriousness and the man’s hopeless condition.²

At first glance, the question Jesus asks seems rhetorical. After almost four decades of illness and pain, wouldn’t the answer be obvious? Yet He asks if he wants to be healed.

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: THURSDAYS AT 12:00PM, HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 153

Maryland

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This displays the caring heart of the Lord who loves to restore to wholeness. It also reminds us that God will not force someone to be whole, physically or spiritually, who doesn't want anything to do with Him. No one will be taken to heaven kicking and screaming against his will.

III. THE UNINFORMED ANSWER (5:7)

John 5:7 - The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me."

The paralytic didn't bother to answer "yes" to Jesus' question because to him, what he wanted was immaterial. He implies that he desperately wants healed, but cannot get to the water before others who are more mobile. In his mind, the one way to fix his issues will not happen. This was his way of recruiting some help the next time the waters moved.

There is that word "way" again. The Bible has much to say about the ways of man and the ways of God. Since we are born into sin, our ways naturally lead down broken paths. The more we listen to our own small hearts, the further in trouble we get. What makes sense to us, what makes us happy, what is fair to us – all these things and more define the way we will go.

Proverbs 14:12 - There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

But there is a way to go that originates outside of us from another source. The way of God is revealed in the Scriptures and will not steer us to an imperfect path. When we place ourselves under the umbrella of God's authority as He has defined reality, then we find His ways are the best.

Proverbs 12:28 - In the way of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death.

The Scriptures make it clear that mankind's natural bent is not to follow God's ways. Unless God Himself does a work in the heart of a person will they be able to please Him with obedience. This gives even more reason to trust God because His ways are best even if they can't be immediately understood.

Isaiah 55:9 - For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.

We can't box God in. Just when you think there's only one way for a situation to be resolved, His higher ways may go in a completely different direction.

IV. THE UNEXPECTED SOLUTION (5:8, 9)

John 5:8, 9— Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk." Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day.

How could this man anticipate what Jesus did for him? It didn't involve crawling or water or anything in his limited mind. Jesus just spoke, again displaying His deity and power over the physical world. Just as the wine was made from water and tasted great in John 2, the paralytic experienced a perfect miracle as he stood for the first time in 38 years on perfect legs and walked away.

GOD MAY TAKE US THROUGH DIFFICULTY, BUT HIS WAY OF WORKING A SITUATION OUT WILL ALMOST ASSUREDLY BE UNEXPECTED SINCE HIS WAYS ARE NOT OUR WAYS.

That's why the lyrics of "My Way" are tragic. If the best thing a man's got is himself, he's in trouble. But it is priceless to have a loving, powerful, unselfish, giving, caring God with purposes and ways that are perfect and far beyond our puny perspectives. I urge you to turn to God's ways and reject the myth that humans have all the answers needed to live life successfully. We must let Him show us the way and let Him define what true success really is.

¹ John MacArthur. *MacArthur Study Bible Online* © 2001-2011 Crossway. Notes from John 5:3a.

² Tom Constable. (2003; 2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Jn 5:5). Galaxie Software.