

Jeff Whitebread
PO Box 123, Harrisburg, PA 17108
484-680-4260
Jeff.Whitebread@capitolcom.org

God Sees and God Cares

John 5:1-18

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDY **201st General Assembly**

- **TUESDAY (SESSION) @ 8:00 AM**
IN ROOM 203, RYAN BLDG.
- **WEDNESDAY (EVERY) @ 1:00 PM**
IN ROOM 203, RYAN BLDG.

Capitol Commission Bible studies are held on Tuesday and Wednesday. The legislator Bible study meets from 8:00-8:45 AM in Room 203, Ryan Bldg. (during session weeks). An open-to-all Bible study meets from 1:00-1:30 PM in Room 203, Ryan Bldg. (during session weeks). The Bible studies are nonpartisan and non-denominational, and will focus on the Gospel of John for the 2017 General Assembly.

– Jeff Whitebread, Pennsylvania State Minister, Capitol Commission

John 5:1-18: “God Sees and God Cares”

Growing up in Berwick, my friend and I spent many summer days at Ber-Vaughn park - there were countless things to do, and we enjoyed the pool, playground, fields, and picnic areas. But for us, the most intriguing part of the park was the tennis courts.

We had no clue how to play the game, and so we came up with a version that had some vague semblance to the original, but in truth, it looked more like a mixture between badminton and table tennis. As I recall, in order to add some excitement to this somewhat dull game, it often became a mini baseball field in which we would launch the tennis ball over the fence, which would bring great celebration on the hitter's part. It was more or less enjoyable and kept us occupied, that is, until it was time to go fetch the balls.

One day a man who watched our attempts at the game, as well as our foolishness asked us, “Would you like to play the real thing?”

“We looked at each other and agreed.”

And within minutes he showed us the game of tennis, as well as giving us some basic instruction about the difficult and rewarding game that the court was built for.

Waiting for What?

(John 5:2) - The pool of Bethesda was a well-known place of healing. It was located in Jerusalem, and was to the north of the Temple area. This site has been excavated by archaeologists, and the evidence suggests that the pool wasn't just a place of healing for the Jews. What has been found

is that pagans as well as Jews, regarded it as a sacred site, and at one point in history it was dedicated to the healing god Asclepius.

The pool seems to have worked in this manner. The waters of the pool would bubble up on occasion; and when that took place, the first person in would be healed. Some of the people of that day reckoned that the bubbling water was caused by an angel.

Reflection:

Clearly this shrine was not particularly successful, especially for this man. Jesus sees him and finds out that lying there had become a way of life as he waited for healing from the pool. One of the most encouraging things about Jesus is that he has eyes that see, he sees people, he cares and values them, - and as we see with this man, he learns his story and invites him into an encounter with the true and living God.

The Hebrew scriptures tell us, “the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen the hearts of those truly committed to him” (2 Chronicles 16:9) People are not simply scenery to Jesus along some inevitable march to the cross. The faces he encounters are his business, they really matter to him. He sees the woman at the well, he sees this man lying near this pool – and, even now, he sees you and he sees me. He looks upon our lives with a mixture of love and joy, as well as longing because he desires us to be those people who, like little children, fully see their need for interaction with him, those who would entrust their lives to him and seek to receive strengthening that only he can bring.

Now this whole scene, with its legends and its pagan associations, was like us playing on a tennis court. The pool spoke of something greater, like the possibility of miraculous healing or even the remote chance at a divine encounter. At best, those seeking healing pursued this encounter mechanically, or at worst it was a waste of time and only led to wishful thinking. Like this man, the question we must ask when we consider our choices and actions is, “How is life working for us?”

Are You Prepared to be Healed?

(John 5:6) – Jesus' question strikes to the heart of the matter for this man. Do you really want to get better, or are you quite happy to eke out your days around this pool with reasons as to why healing has been out of reach? Our broken ways can become comfortable to us. We know what to expect, it might not be much, but at least we know the routine. Healing on the other hand thrusts us into a whole new world, and it changes not only our lives, but all those around us. When we change, others also are forced to deal with the people we are becoming. The end of the story is

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not only being freed from what has kept us in bondage, but what will we do with this great new opportunity that waits for us.

Reflection:

The true son of the true God steps into the scene of this man's life, as well as ours. He has the power and inclination to bring healing and an abundant life. As with the royal official's son, it only takes a word, in the case of this cripple, it was the command to take up his mat and walk. It is our response to the life-giving words of Jesus that is the question at hand – because we are called to believe. Now we believe something not when we say we believe, or even when we believe we believe. We believe something when we act as if what we believe is true. By acting upon Jesus' word, this man found himself launched into a brand-new world, a much harder one for sure, but a much more satisfying way of life that goes with no longer being a cripple. The same runs true for our lives, Jesus stands and offers us life, his life, which is the good, abundant, and easy way to live – but, it requires us to learn from him, to go his way and for us to allow him to help shoulder our load.

(John 5:8) - In this healing, we see a hint of what the new creation looks like. When Jesus says, 'Get up!', he uses a word that is regularly used in the NT to describe resurrection. Here is part of the inner secret of Jesus' work. He isn't trying to use a force within the existing creation itself to put right something else within that old creation. He is bringing new life, a new creation. It burst through the present world, and it brings healing and new possibilities. The old creation realizes - like my friend and I as we began to play tennis - that this is what had been intended all along.

Now people found this disturbing, and no wonder – the new creation was superseding the old one. It is similar to being in two different time zones, the Judeans think it's time for rest, but Jesus is wide awake, and ready to carry on God's business. While the word sign does not occur in this passage, by now John expects us to be counting for ourselves.

What's Your Life Built On?

(John 5:10) – The issue concerning the sabbath, as we learn from the OT, was to highlight the seventh day as a time when the creator God rested from his work in making the world. The law-observant Jews kept the sabbath as a strict day without work, and based on tradition, defined quite carefully what 'work' might include. Seemingly, Jesus steps in and continually does things on the sabbath that could be understood, at least by his opponents, as deliberate 'work.' Even as we consider the present situation, this man had been crippled for close to forty years, and waiting one more day wouldn't have caused him any real trouble. But Jesus set upon doing work on that day. Now issuing a command, as Jesus did, was hardly work – but, what he told the man to do in carrying his mat, at least according to tradition, was definitely work.

So what's up with Jesus? The simple answer is new creation, Jesus' was revealing that Israel's God was then and there launching a new creation

which superseded the old one, and its timing was taking precedence. Obviously, this would not be popular among law-observant Judeans. And it is here we meet Jesus' strongest opposition to this point. As the 'signs' start to pile up, so the response to them becomes fierce, people begin to realize just what it will cost for them to follow where these signs point.

(John 5:14) - If Jesus work of healing and new creation was pressing forward, was there anything besides this opposition that was holding it up? We find Jesus' response to the cripple man a clue to this question when he says, "stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. What could this possibly mean?"

Reflection:

Jesus will insist in John 9:1-3 that the condition of a man born blind had nothing to do with anyone's sin. Then what is Jesus pressing us to understand? I believe it has everything to do with one's allegiance. Will it be totally with Jesus or will it be somewhere else, or maybe, we just sprinkle a little Jesus into the ineffective practices of our lives. This man had been misguided for close to forty years in placing his confidence of healing in an ineffective pool of water. Then blaming others for not helping him into the pool, he is unable to consider his own choices and actions. Now, when questioned by the religious leaders, he can't view his situation in the light of Jesus' authority revealed by his healing.

We might ask, "Was anything this man's responsibility?" Certainly, one can't control many of the things that happen to us in life, but we do have a say in how we will respond. Now sin, as a condition in a person, is alienation from God's love, his interaction and his law. Then over time, due to this disconnection from God, one develops sinful practices which form a person's habits, choices, and finally his character. For this cripple, as with us, we must decide who is right about life. Will it be Jesus we entrust our lives to? Or will we seek to conform our lives based upon the wisdom of the world where, seemingly wealth, power, and a self-consumed life are bowed down to as the greatest good and highest priority. This man had a choice, would he seek to conform to the powers of his day, the religious establishment who, as history reveals, would be swept away in the decades to come by the Romans – and as Jesus warns, is certainly something far worse. Or would he place his confidence in Jesus and learn how life truly works. Without lives build upon Jesus and his teachings, we lay a shaky foundation that will be swept away when the storms of life come - as they do for each person walking this earth.

Book referenced:

Wright, NT. John for Everyone. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002

Legislator Bible study: Tuesday (Session), at 8 AM,
Room 203 - Ryan Office Building
Open-To-All Bible Study: Wednesday (Session), at 1
PM, Library - Ryan Office Building