

Human inability

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[0 : 00] And now to John chapter 5, and let us read again at verse 5. John chapter 5, verse 5.

And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he said unto him, And he said, Wilt thou be made whole? 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 stepeth down before me.

Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked.

Jesus, on this occasion, goes up to Jerusalem. It is the occasion of one of the Jewish feasts.

Jesus, as a Jewish man made under the law, and intent on fulfilling all righteousness, carefully observed all those Jewish ordinances.

[1 : 24] He went up to Jerusalem, and on this occasion he went to the pool of Bethesda. That pool with its five porches, its five porticos, or if you like, five colonnades.

In those covered areas, those five covered areas, there were lying many infirm people. A great multitude of them.

They suffered from various diseases. Some were blind, some were crippled, some were paralyzed.

They were lying there, waiting for the moving of the waters. At a certain period, from time to time, periodically, an angel from God came, and he agitated the waters of the pool of Bethesda.

And the first person to step into the pool after the waters had been agitated by the angel was healed of whatever infirmity he was suffering from.

[2 : 31] The angel came and imparted those healing properties to the waters of the pool of Bethesda. And the healing virtue was limited to one person only on each occasion.

Now, there is no similar story elsewhere in the New Testament. And there is no account of the phenomenon of the pool of Bethesda and its healing virtue outside of the scriptures, in Jewish literature, outside of the scriptures.

We have reason to believe that there was particular activity on the part of the angels during the time when Jesus walked this earth. We do not know when those healing properties were first given to the pool of Bethesda.

We do not know when this phenomenon came to an end, when it ceased. We simply reverently accept that it pleased God at this time, for a time to send an angel from time to time there to the pool of Bethesda to agitate the waters and in doing so to impart to them those healing properties.

There were many infirm folk lying there in those colonnades at the pool of Bethesda. But it is one of them on whom Jesus focused his attention.

[4 : 15] The plight of this one man particularly drew forth the compassion of the Lord Jesus. He was a particularly distressing case, of course.

And it was this one man who particularly called forth Jesus' compassion on this occasion. In the days of the famine, in the time of Elijah the prophet, there were many widows in Israel.

But it was to only one, to the widow of Sarepta, that the prophet Elijah was sent. In the days of the prophet Elisha, there were many lepers in Israel, but none of them was healed, saving Naaman the Syrian.

There were many sick and infirm, impotent folk there, at the pool of Bethesda, when Jesus went there on this occasion. But we read of only one, who on this occasion received the miraculous healing.

God says, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

[5 : 34] As we look then for a little while this evening, at this interesting miracle, let us notice first of all the plight of this man, and secondly the cure.

First of all, the plight of the man. It must have been a heart-rending experience for anyone of compassion, for any sensitive person, anyone with kindly and tender feelings, to have gone there to the pool of Bethesda.

There were so many infirm folk lying there. A great multitude of them, we are told, in this passage. Some of them, as we are told here, were blind. Some of them were crippled. Some of them lacked power. They were paralyzed.

They lacked power in their limbs or in their muscles. There were so many impotent folk there, people who lacked power in limb and in muscle.

[6 : 43] A heart-rending experience. But when Jesus went there, and he saw this great crowd, his compassion would be drawn out certainly.

But his attention was focused upon one man in particular. And we focus our attention tonight upon this one man in particular.

He was lying there at the pool of Bethesda. He was a man without power, we are told. He is called the impotent man there in verse 7.

There was in his limbs, or in one of his limbs at any rate, no power. He was paralyzed. He was unable to get up and to walk around freely.

He just lay there, waiting for the moving of the waters in the hope that he would get in there and receive healing.

[7 : 41] The plight of this man. And we too, we in our natural state are sick. We are sin sick.

Sick with the disease of sin. We are all of us sinners. We are all of us broken God's commandments. There is none righteous, no, not one, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

This disease of sin has entered into our bloodstream and it has affected us. We have committed innumerable sins. We have broken God's commandments, all of them.

God has commanded us, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind, soul and strength. We have not done that. You and I have broken this first and greatest of all the commandments.

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, God has said. We have not done that either. We have rebelled against God. The carnal mind is enmity against God.

[8 : 54] There has been that enmity in us. That is what is in our heart, in our natural condition. And we have selfishly pursued our own interests to the neglect of the interests of others.

We are guilty of breaking God's law, guilty of innumerable sins. And there is also this terrible corruption that has pervaded our whole nature.

And as we think of this man's plight, notice also his inability. References made to it there in verse 7. He said, 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. He lay there and every time when the waters were agitated and he wanted to get into the pool, he was unable to get into the waters.

Someone else was always there stepping into the water before him. It was a case of every man for himself. This man was quite unable to do what it was necessary to do to obtain healing.

[10 : 11] He was utterly powerless. powerless. And so it is with the sinner in his sin. He too is powerless without ability.

There are no works of which he is capable that will save him, that will obtain for him God's salvation. He has broken God's law.

We have all broken God's law. And there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that the sinner can do that can atone for his law-breaking.

He may make strenuous efforts to keep the law of God. He may give himself to the helping of others.

He may devote himself to all kinds of religious exercises and activities. but not any of these will atone for any of his sins.

[11 : 10] Those actions on his part are powerless to atone for his sins. The prophet Micah long ago asked, will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? If I perform all those sacrifices and offer all those sacrifices, will that suffice?

No, it will not. They will not atone for one sin. It is good to read the Bible. It is God's word, and therein there is set before us the way of salvation. It is good to pray to God.

We are all dependent upon him. It is good to attend the services of God's house. There the gospel is proclaimed and the way of salvation is explained and set before people.

[12 : 16] By attending to these things you are putting yourself in the way of blessing. But none of these things, in itself, for all of them together, in themselves, will save any sinner.

There is nothing that we ourselves can do by our own efforts that will put us right with God. By the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh, says God, be justified in my sight.

The way of salvation is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who by his sacrifice at Calvary has atoned for sin.

You must repent and believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ if you are to be saved. But then you do not have within you, in yourself, the power to do that, to repent and to believe.

You are spiritually dead, dead in trespasses and in sins. That is the condition of every sinner who has not been born again of the Spirit of God.

[13 : 32] Man in his sin is totally depraved. What that means is that his every faculty has been vitiated and has been poisoned by sin.

There is no spiritual good of which the sinner in his natural condition is capable. He is not capable of doing any spiritual good.

He is spiritually powerless. Man's inability. This awful disease of sin has affected man's intellect.

In his natural condition he does not understand spiritual truth. the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God. For they are foolishness unto him. Neither can he know them.

For they are spiritually discerned. This awful disease of sin has affected his emotions as well.

[14 : 36] Perverted his emotions. He loves what is evil in his sin and he hates what is good. In God's Christ he sees no beauty that he should desire him.

He's just to him a root out of a dry ground having no form or comeliness no beauty that he should desire him. And this awful disease of sin has spread to the man's will as well.

It has enslaved his will. It has robbed him of his freedom of will. Man in sin is the slave of sin.

Enslaved by it. And if you are here tonight still unconverted still in your sin then that is your condition that is your plight.

people sometimes say that a man's salvation a person's salvation depends upon his own decision.

[15 : 39] The way the salvation of God is set before him it is presented to him in the gospel. And they say that in the last analysis it depends upon the man himself whether or not he accepts that salvation.

it depends upon himself to accept it if he so desires. Let the man make the first move. Let the sinner make the first move and the spirit will then come. The spirit will aid him.

That's the view that is common. The view that is common has been common for a very long time now and is still common in large sections of the evangelical church.

But it is not true. It is not biblical. It dependent upon the work of the spirit of God to make the first move as he is for all the other moves.

He is dependent upon the spirit of God. The work of salvation is God's work and what this story illustrates for us is man's inability.

[16 : 51] The plight of this man. He lay there at the pool of Bethesda for a long time. He suffered this paralysis for 38 years. It is not said of course that he lay at the pool of Bethesda for 38 years.

But he suffered from this paralysis for that time. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick. This man must have felt himself to be in a quite hopeless condition.

Every time the waters were agitated and he tried to get into the water. His hope was frustrated.

Somebody else was always there before him. And so it is with the sinner.

Unless God intervenes, his case remains hopeless. He will not even find relief from his plight, release from his plight by physical death, for there will await him a lost eternity.

The man's plight. But secondly, let us notice the cure. The cure. Jesus came and he saw this multitude of sick folk there at the pool of Bethesda and his heart would have gone out in compassion to those people there, those sick and halted and impotent folk, the multitude of them there by the pool of Bethesda.

[18 : 23] Unquestionably that is so we know of another occasion on which Jesus looked upon the multitude and he had compassion upon them for he saw them as sheep not having a shepherd.

Without any question the compassion of our Lord would have gone out to this great multitude there in those five covered colonnades up the pool of Bethesda.

He saw them and particularly his compassion was drawn out to this one man on this occasion to this man who had been lying there and who had suffered this paralysis for some 38 years.

Jesus knew that he had suffered for a long time. No doubt it was supernatural knowledge on his part. Knowledge conveyed from the divine to the human nature.

We know that there was this communication between the natures by the Holy Spirit. At any rate, whatever the explanation, Jesus knew that this man had suffered for so long, for 38 years.

[19 : 33] And Jesus was moved with compassion. God and he singled out this one man there, this impotent man, this paralyzed man, this man without the strength in his limbs, or in one of his limbs at any rate, for he was unable to get up and walk around.

Jesus singled him out as the one man who on this occasion would experience the miraculous healing. Jesus asked the man a question.

He said to him, wilt thou be made whole? Do you want to be made whole? Do you really desire healing? Is this what you really want to be healed of your paralysis?

That is the force of Jesus question. And to us it may seem at first to be a strange question. Is it not strange to ask a paralyzed man do you want to be healed?

Yet you know there were people at the time who really did not want healing. There were some who were infirm and they made their living by begging and some of them perhaps made more by begging than they would make by working.

[20 : 54] And so Jesus comes to this man and he asks him do you want to be made whole? Why is it that Jesus asks this question?

Do you want to be made whole, healthy again? Wilt thou be made whole? He asked that question in order to awaken in the man the desire for healing and to bring to expression that desire.

He wanted the man to express in words his desire for healing. The sinners nowadays and indeed in every age who obtain and come to experience the salvation of God are those who truly desire that salvation.

One of God's first dealings with any soul whom he purposes to bring to a knowledge of salvation is to awaken in that soul a great longing for forgiveness and for the salvation that he has to bestow.

You see there are so many who are just not willing to be cured of their sins. They are loath to part company with their sins. And Jesus comes to the sinner and he asks him are you willing to be healed?

[22 : 24] Do you really wish to part company with your sins? Do you really desire the forgiveness of God? Is it your great longing to be right with God?

Do you have this great desire in you to know that you are safe for time and safe for eternity? Do you really want to belong to the family of God?

Do you want God's salvation and want it now? Not just twenty thirty years hence do you want it now? You hear of others who are being converted to the Lord Jesus Christ and when you hear of that do you say to yourself oh that I were converted to him wilt thou be made whole?

and Jesus asked the man that question also in order to bring from him a confession and that knowledge of his own inability he wanted it to be conspicuously plain to this man himself and to all others also that the work of healing was his work Christ's work that man himself had contributed nothing whatever to it God must have all the glory you and I in our natural condition are unable to respond to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ if we are to be saved then God must come and he must save us in our sin such is our plight that we are unable to do what is necessary in order that we might obtain salvation man in his natural state is helpless now notice the command the command that came from our savior to this man we have it there in verse 8

Jesus saith unto him rise take up thy bed and walk but you know it was not only that command that issued from our savior there also issued from him the power for the man to obey that command there came the power of healing with the command the command was issued and the power of God the power of Christ himself went out with that command Christ made his command to that man the vehicle of his power to him for we're told that immediately the man was made whole and he did what he was told he took up his bed and he walked the man himself was powerless but here he was

he obeys the command of Christ he gets up he stands up he walks around he takes that pallet in which he was lying he lifts it up and he walks away power has entered into that man's body [25 : 45] Christ spoke the word of command with it went the power the power entered into the man's body and he rose up lifted up his bed and walked away he hadn't been able to do that for 38 years the divine word of command was accompanied with divine power you and I if we are to be saved need to hear the divine command in the gospel and for it we need that it be accompanied by the power of God himself we need the power to accompany that command the command is issued Christ gives his command to you tonight believe on the Lord Jesus Christ come to me he says repent be reconciled to God but he does not at all suppose that there is in you of yourself the power to obey that command if you are to respond to the gospel the power itself must come from him it is the spirit that you need it is the power of the holy spirit you need and what the spirit does is he enlightens the mind he gives understanding when a person has been enlightened by the spirit very often what he exclaims is ah

I see it light has dawned my darkness has been dispelled what the spirit does is he renews the will he sets the will free he makes that person willing he makes that sinner willing to respond to the gospel and to come to christ he persuades and enables that person to embrace christ freely offered to him in the gospel he makes them willing so that willingly and gladly he makes choice of christ a willing people in thy day of power shall come to thee and made willing that sinner is irresistibly drawn in repentance and in faith to the savior the what in other words what has happened is that that sinner has been renewed by the spirit of god he has been born again by the spirit of god the new birth has been given to him and inevitably having been born of the spirit he repents of sin and believes upon the lord jesus christ you must repent and return to god if you are to be saved of yourself you cannot do that without the renewing of the spirit of god what you need is is that the word the word of the gospel command come to you accompanied by in the power of the holy spirit of god and so what i say to you tonight is read the word of god read it diligently it is god's word occupy yourself with the word of god meditate upon it be particularly occupied with a gospel command in the word with a gospel invitation in the word turn to god's own word listen for god's voice speaking to you there heed that voice and what i say to you is seek the spirit's working in your life ask god that his spirit will come to you that his holy spirit will work in you plead with god for that earnestly desire that and plead for it word and spirit the word of god accompanied by the spirit of god that is your only hope seek that and seek it with all your heart notice notice the man's obedience rise take up thy bed and walk and immediately the man did so he took up his bed and he walked away he obeyed the command of christ and the command comes to you tonight believe on the lord jesus christ will you obey that command are you willing to obey it i've been laying emphasis tonight in this sermon on the sovereignty of god in the salvation of a sinner but my friend there is a responsibility laid upon you to obey the gospel command to repent of your sin and to believe upon the lord jesus christ do not ask me to explain that to reconcile these two things they are two sides of an incomprehensible mystery man is commanded to do man in his sin is commanded to do what apart what is commanded to believe upon the lord jesus christ he is obligated to do what apart from supernatural grace he cannot do when man forfeited his ability by his falling to sin god did not lose his right to demand believe on the lord jesus christ and thou shalt be saved i set before you tonight life and death i tell you my friends there is a free offer made to you in the gospel it's a genuine offer god comes and he makes this free offer to you of forgiveness of life eternal of everlasting salvation it's a genuine offer and it's an offer that is made to every unsaved sinner it's an offer that is made to you if you are here tonight still unconverted still unsaved whosoever believes will be saved whosoever trusts in the lord jesus christ will be saved my friend when god himself a loving and a gracious god makes such a free offer to you a free offer of salvation will you not be of all men most foolish if you turn away from it when a loving saviour who is able to save to the uttermost comes and says to you him that cometh to me i will in no wise cast out do you not have sufficient warrant to come there's your warrant he invites you he freely offers this salvation and he says him that cometh to me i will in no wise cast out oh my friend i appeal to you heed the gospel offer it's made to you the lord himself makes it to you the free offer of the gospel heed it respond come to christ and come to him without delay oh everyone that thirst come ye to the waters yea come buy wine and milk without money and without price let us pray oh lord our gracious god we bless thee for the power of god that goes forth with the gospel we pray that that power will be put forth even here tonight and we pray that those bound by the infirmity of sin will rise and know the

freedom that is in christ will believe upon the lord jesus christ and rejoice in his great salvation come then we pray and work by thy spirit and give thy great salvation for jesus sake amen