

The impotent man healedJohn 5 vv.1-9.

What a lot of trouble and sadness there is in the world.

Just go and look in the hospitals, where thousands of people, young and old, great and small, are lying in long rows of beds. Think too of the poor lunatics, who are kept apart in special asylums. Those poor wretches whose brains are touched, and who year after year, often until their death, drag on their lives in insanity. If we only knew what suffering and strife goes on in the many prisons, then we would have a shock. Certainly it is their own fault that they are there, for they should not have stolen or robbed or committed other crimes. Yet we do not know the causes of all these misdeeds.

One may have had evil companions and through them has come into wrong ways. They have brought him perhaps to places where he should not have gone. What kind of friends do you have? ... Another may have lost in his youthful days both father and mother, and through lack of love came at last on the wrong road and became an evildoer. And so we could go on.

We see only a very little of all the suffering which is experienced. All these miseries, all this sadness, is the fearful outcome of sin.

Yet nowadays there is a lot done for such sad cases. The insane are nursed and cared for. Hard work is done in the prisons to bring back to the right paths those who have strayed. In the hospitals clever doctors and many nurses try to help the numerous sufferers. Day and night they busy themselves in nursing and caring for the sick. Some of you too have quite certainly lain in hospital at some time. One may have had an operation another has been there for some illness or other. Yet all were no doubt looked after wonderfully.

Hospitals then are a great blessing for our people.

In earlier times there were no hospitals, and yet there were just as many sick and weak people as now.

In Jerusalem however in the days when Jesus was on this earth, there was a hospital. Close by the Sheep Gate there was a pool. Around this pool there were five porches, or five large rooms, and these were filled with sick and infirm people. This hospital was called BETHESDA (the House of mercy).

No, the inmates did not lie in spotless white-painted beds. There were no nurses, let alone doctors. So Bethesda was not a hospital in the sense that we picture one. Not a bit of it. It bore no resemblance to one.

Yet a very large number of ailing and sick people were gathered there. Whatever for? ... Why were they there then? Why did they not prefer to remain at home if they received no treatment there?

Well children, there in Bethesda at a certain season there occurred a miracle. From time to time a sick or infirm person was completely healed. That person could then return home fully restored. But how did that come about? ...

Listen! At certain times an angel descended from heaven and touched the water ^{in the pool}. Not that the angel was visible, but they could tell by the water. This suddenly became disturbed, or in other words, waves appeared. It was just as though someone was stirring the water very hard. That was the sign. That is what all those sufferers were waiting for.

When that happened, then each one tried to walk or crawl as quickly as possible to the pool, and whoever was the first to get into the water was completely healed.

One time a cripple hobbling painfully on crutches, another time a blind person would jump in. Sometimes ^{one who was} ~~seriously ill~~ would be carried there by friends. Whenever the water was troubled then, one and only one was healed. The others then had to wait until the next time.

Nobody knew when the angel would come. One time it may be in the morning, another time perhaps in the evening. While the heavenly messenger was absent all the waiting patients were in suspense, but when the wonder took place, those who remained waited for the next occasion. The suspense was then broken for a while, for they all knew that not one more could be healed until the angel again troubled the water.

There were indeed no doctors in Bethesda, yet there was an excellent remedy, a divine, a heavenly medicine.

Oh, how good God was still towards a sinful and guilty people. Time and time again He sent His messenger, that one might be healed of his complaint. How thankful the Jews should have been for such an undeserved blessing.

Come, in our thoughts we too will go and look at Bethesda. It is crowded there, for one of the great feasts is being celebrated in Jerusalem, probably the feast of Passover. Thousands of Jews from all over the country are gathered in Jerusalem. It is moreover the Sabbath day.

We walk between the many sick, who lie on beds or mattresses upon the ground, waiting for the troubling of the water. There are also numerous visitors. Friends and acquaintances look out for each other.

In our hospitals too, there are visiting hours. Then a mother can go and see her sick daughter; then a man can sit by his sick wife's bed and talk for a while; then children can rush to see their father or mother. Often they bring something for the patient and then sit for a friendly bedside chat. Those are the happiest hours of the week. Everybody longs for visiting hour.

Now, in Bethesda too, on this Sabbath day a large number of visitors come to see the sick. Cheering words are spoken. Now and then perhaps laughter echoes.

But ... just look over there. Evidently in a corner of one of the five rooms there lies upon a simple mat an infirm man. This poor man has no visitors. Nobody looks at him. Silent and lost in thought he lies there, glancing sadly at the hustle and bustle around him.

Sadly? ... Why? ... Oh, he has lain there for so long. He too has come to Bethesda for healing. He, too has time and again done his utmost to be the first to spring into the water when it was troubled, but he has never succeeded. Each time, somebody else, however narrowly, had been the first to get into the healing water. Then he had gone back to his place to wait for the next time, and to try yet again.

Weeks, months, ... years have passed. Hundreds have come and gone. For a long time he had persevered, for a long time he had hoped that he would eventually succeed in being the first. But his desire has not been fulfilled. At last he became despondent.

He has now been lying there for .. however long do you think? ... For thirty eight years. What a long time, isn't it? Ill for thirty eight years. What a time, what a long time. Nobody has ever been willing to help him. No visitors have ever said "Now we will just give you a helping

No, he lay there, and they have just let him remain there. Is it any wonder that the man is sad? Would we not be sad also?... Just think about it, thirty eight years of illness. What will have been going on in the heart of this poor sufferer? The numerous visitors in Bethesda do not know. Nobody knows that. Nobody? ...

Just then a man approaches the lonely invalid and looks upon him. Surprised, the impotent man looks up at Him. He does not know this Stranger, he has never seen Him before. He is quite unknown to him.

Nobody bothers about the bed-ridden man, nobody knows the feelings of his heart. Yet this Stranger seeks him out. This Visitor does know what is going on in the poor man's heart. Yes, it is the Lord Jesus.

At the feast Jesus has also come up to Jerusalem and now, on this Sabbath day, he is walking in Bethesda. He comes to the place where misery abounds.

The lonely man looks at Him in surprise and enquiry. What does this Stranger want to do with him? ... Nobody ever looks at him, surely? ...

All at once the Lord Jesus asks: "Wilt thou be made whole?"

What a question to ask of someone who has been bed-ridden for thirty eight years! Did the man not badly want to be restored to health? Of course he did!

Despondently he answers: "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."

Is it not shameful that during all those years not one of the inhabitants of Jerusalem has helped him? The man sick of the palsy at Capernaum had had helpers; four men, who had brought him to Jesus with the utmost difficulty. In Jerusalem however, where so many pious Pharisees live, there is not one man to be found, who is willing to carry this poor unfortunate to the water, which is so close at hand.

This Visitor, however, does not walk on indifferently on hearing this sad reply. No! At once the Lord Jesus says "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk." And the Lord Jesus not only speaks these words, but in addition, He gives the man the power to obey that command.

Look, he who for thirty eight years has been powerless, stands up. He feels strength returning into his sick and ^ewakened body. He believes the word of the unknown Stranger, who has thus commanded.

He bends down and rolls up the mattress on which he has lain for so long. But then, when he looks round, the Lord Jesus is nowhere to be seen. He has disappeared from view. But the man does not know that it is Jesus who has restored him to health.

Will that man have been happy? Now what do you think? ...

Look, there he is leaving Bethesda with the rolled mattress under his arm. He is healed, completely restored; suddenly, and quite unexpectedly. He is healed, without going down into the water, but solely through the almighty word of the Lord Jesus.

John 5 vv.10-47.

"Do you ^{not} know that today is the Sabbath day?"

The restored invalid is walking calmly along the street. But just then some Jews come up to him. Perhaps they were Pharisees. They look at him reproachfully, with anger in their eyes, and say reprovingly: "It is the ~~Sabbath~~ ^{Sabbath} day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed." We would say: "You mustn't do that, it is forbidden."

But the man replies: "He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk."

At once they answer sharply. "What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk?" ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ In other words, "Who is it has made you whole?"

Well, that is a question the restored man cannot answer, for he did not know Jesus, had never even seen Him before.

A little later the man is walking in the temple. Probably he has come to bring a thank-offering for his miraculous cure. Now he too can celebrate the feast; the first time for many a long year.

Suddenly Jesus walks up to him and says quietly: "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come to thee."

From this it would appear that this man had formerly committed some serious misdeed, for which his long lasting affliction had been a punishment. Of what sin he had thus been guilty, we do not know.

The Lord Jesus warns him of sin. He warns him in love, for He says "Lest a worse thing come to thee". It is for the man's own good.

At once this man, who for thirty eight years had been infirm, goes to the Jews who have rebuked him for carrying his bed on the Sabbath, and tells them that it was Jesus who had made him whole.

Now, why did he tell them? Is he betraying Jesus? ... Some think that he said it to honour Jesus and that it was not his intention to betray Jesus. But the Bible is silent on this point, so I cannot tell you with certainty.

When those pious Jews hear however that it is Jesus of Nazareth who has told the man to take up his bed and walk, their hearts are filled with resentment and anger. They seek Him and persecute Him, yes, they try to kill Him. Why? What wrong has He done?

Well, the Jews think that Jesus is doing things on purpose which are not permitted on the Sabbath day. They consider that Jesus is des^ecrating that day deliberately. And now they want to kill Him, for a Sabbath-breaker had to be slain.

But the enemies of the Lord Jesus are mistaken, for Jesus is certainly not breaking the Sabbath.

For sure, we are not to work on the Lord's Day. Schools are shut and factories are then closed down. Of course! But there are certain things which have to be done. For instance: the farmer must look after his cattle; doctors must visit seriously ^{sick} ~~ill~~ patients; nurses must tend the sick. This is work which is ESSENTIAL. Such work may well be carried out on the Lord's Day.

For the Lord Jesus to restore this poor sufferer on the Sabbath, was a work of mercy, and in doing so Jesus did not desecrate the Sabbath.

Do you know what answer the Lord Jesus gives to those angry Jews? Just read it: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work". Now, what does Jesus mean by that? Who is His Father? ... You know the answer don't you?

God is His Father. God sustains and rules the world. God governs everything

even on the Sabbath day too. So the Lord Jesus meant by this to say that He is the Son of God, the Messiah.

The Jews understand Him and now they become even more furious. What? Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah? ... They do not believe it, they will not believe it. They reject Him; they accuse Him of blasphemy.

After this the Lord Jesus ^{spoke} a great deal more, children, but that may still be too difficult for you. He warned them not to reject Him. He reminded them of the words of John the Baptist, who had always pointed out to the Jewish people the King who would come. He recalled to them the words of the prophets, who have foretold it all.

But it was no use. They become even more incensed. Their hearts are filled with hatred and revenge. Jesus is in the greatest danger in Jerusalem, for they are intent on murdering Him. But His time has not yet come to die and so He leaves Jerusalem and returns to Galilee. There for the time being He is still safe, for there the hatred of Him is not yet so intense.

Oh, boys and girls, which of you are like those proud Jerusalem Jews? Do you too reject the Lord Jesus? ... Ask Him to cleanse you of sin. Ask Him to remove the enmity from your hearts. He can renew our heart, and if not ...? Then we shall do exactly the same as once the Pharisees in Jerusalem did, reject Him.