

November/December 2009

SMALL GROUP SERIES:

7 Signs of Jesus

Discussion Guide

Sign #3

Jesus Heals the Man at the Pool

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1 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda [a] and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3-4 Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. [b] 5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

7 "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

8 Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." 9 At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath.

Footnotes:

- a. John 5:2 Some manuscripts Bethzatha; other manuscripts Bethsaida
- b. John 5:3 Some later manuscripts and some ancient witnesses, wholly or in part, paralyzed—and they waited for the moving of the waters. 4From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first person into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease they had.

Facilitator's Guide

Helpful Background Information for the Passage:

Healing shrines were common throughout the ancient world, especially for the worship of Asclepius and other popular deities renowned for healing powers. Most of these shrines required the supplicants to purify themselves at the adjoining fountain or other source of water.

5:1. John does not specify which Jewish feast is the occasion for Jesus' trip to Jerusalem, although some manuscripts have "the feast," which would mean the Feast of Tabernacles, as in Jewish tradition (not Passover).

5:2. Although scholars do not agree on the site of Bethesda (or its exact spelling), the site most scholars currently favor is under St. Anne's Monastery in Jerusalem. This site had two twin pools, surrounded by four porches, or porticoes, and one porch down the middle separating the pools. Although John writes after Jerusalem was destroyed in 70, his recollection of the site is accurate.

5:3. This site was later used as a pagan healing shrine; given the ancient tendency to reuse older shrines, the Jewish community in Jesus' day probably viewed this pool as a place of healing. The temple authorities undoubtedly did not approve—after all, sacred pools at healing shrines characterized Greek cults like that of Asclepius—but popular religion often ignores religious contradictions that are clearer to the official religious leaders.

5:5. The man had been sick there longer than many people in antiquity lived—for about as many years as Israel had wandered in the wilderness. Ancient reports of healings often specified how long the person had been sick to emphasize the greatness of the healer's cure. Obviously nothing else, including this pool, had succeeded in restoring him.

5:6-9a. In 2:6 and 3:5, Jesus replaces the water of ceremonial purification; in 4:13-14, he replaces the "holy water" of a Samaritan holy site. Here he, not the supposedly healing waters, restores the man.

Taken from the InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary

Helpful Tip of the Week:

One of the core values of Small Groups at RBCPC is the creative expression of love to each other and to our surrounding community in need. There is nothing like participating together in an outwardly focused mission project to solidify your relationships as you grow together as disciples of Jesus. As we approach the holiday season of giving, consider "giving" as a group. The Small Group Ministry Team can help you find a mission project that would fit into your time, budget, gifts, talents, and abilities.

Contact: Scott Schimmel: schimmel.scott@gmail.com
or Rochelle Castillo: rochelle@rbcp.org

Suggestion: Ask each member of your group to pray about it during the coming week and come back next meeting to discuss it.

Jesus Heals the Man at the Pool

START IT

- Where do you turn when you want to distract yourself? (ex. Movies, sports, shopping, etc) Why?

STUDY IT

- Read through the passage and the facilitator guide as a group. As you are reading, make notes in the margins of any observations and/or questions that come immediately to mind. Refer back to those notes as you discuss the following questions.
- Who is the ill man? What might his life have been like up to this point? Why was he waiting at a pool (refer to the commentary on page 3)?
- What was it like to be ill in ancient Israel? Spiritually, physically, emotionally, relationally.
- What do you notice about how Jesus interacts with the man waiting to be healed?
- How does the man respond to Jesus' question?
- How does Jesus speak to the man? What happens?
- What do we learn from this passage about Jesus' power and authority?
- How might this man's life have changed after being healed?
- What is significant about Jesus healing the man at the pool? Who is Jesus, from this passage?

LIVE IT

- In what ways do you need to be made well?
- How does this passage change or alter how you view prayer and interacting with Jesus?

PRAY IT

- That we would be ready to receive Jesus' healing.
- That we would turn to him for healing (share in your group where you might need healing).