

**“Lessons from the Miracles of Christ”:
Healing the Impotent Man at Bethesda**

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**Sources for Healing the Impotent Man at Bethesda,
in the order in which they first appear**

- (1) Wm. Arnold Stevens and Ernest DeWitt Burton, *A Harmony of the Gospels for Historical Study: An Analytical Synopsis of the Four Gospels in the Version of 1881* (Boston: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1893)
- (2) William M. Taylor, D.D., LL.D., *The Miracles of Our Saviour, Expounded and Illustrated* (New York: A.C. Armstrong & Son, 1891)
- (3) Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “The Hospital of Waiters Visited with the Gospel” (1875)

Note: Spurgeon delivered this sermon in London sometime in 1875 and it was published in Vol. 21 of *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (1876). I have been unable to access this volume, so have used *The Treasury of Spurgeon on the Life and Work of Our Lord, Vol. IV, The Miracles of Our Lord, 1*, published by Baker Book House in 1979. This source is coded **Spurgeon1.**

- (4) Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “Jesus at Bethesda, or Waiting Changed for Believing” (1867)

Note: Spurgeon delivered this sermon in London on Apr. 7, 1867 and it was published in Vol. 13 of *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (1868). This source is coded **Spurgeon2.**

- (5) Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “Impotence and Omnipotence” (1890)

Note: Spurgeon delivered this sermon in London on Feb. 16, 1890 and it was published in Vol. 36 of *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (1891). This source is coded **Spurgeon3.**

- (6) Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “A Singular but Needful Question” (1870)

Note: Spurgeon delivered this sermon in London on Oct. 16, 1870 and it was published in Vol. 16 of *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (1871). This source is coded **Spurgeon4**.

- (7) Mrs. E. G. **White**, *The Desire of Ages* (Takoma Park, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Assn., 1898)
- (8) Richard Chenevix **Trench**, D.D., *Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord, Revised, with Additions* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883)

Key

- (a) **Green** indicates where a source author first appears, or where he/she reappears.
- (b) **Yellow** highlights most parallelisms.
- (c) **Tan** highlights parallelisms not occurring on the same row, or parallelisms separated by yellowed parallelisms.
- (d) An underlined word or words indicates where the source and the Sadlers pointedly differ from one another.
- (e) **Red** indicates an obvious mistake.
- (f) **Gold** points out words and themes that will be treated in a later discussion.

HEALING THE IMPOTENT MAN AT BETHESDA

INTRODUCTORY

0.1 *Preceding Events*.—Important events in the Saviour’s life since the healing of the paralytic:—

XIII: GROWING HOSTILITY OF THE
SCRIBES AND PHARISEES. (*A Harmony
of the Gospels* 49)

§42. THE CALL OF MATTHEW. Matt. 9:9-13. Mark 2:13-17. Luke 5:27-32.

§43. THE QUESTION ABOUT FASTING. Matt. 9:14-17. Mark 2:18-22. Luke 5:33-39.

§44. THE INFIRM MAN AT THE POOL OF BETHSAIDA. John, chap. 5

0.2 1. The call of Matthew. Mark 2:13-17.

0.3 2. Question about fasting. Luke 5:33-39.

0.4 *Main Reference*.—John 5:1-17.

0.5 *Other References*.—None.

[*Note*: Sadler used the KJV text here.]

0.6 *Bible Story of the Miracle*.—
“After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. 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 saith unto him, 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 steppeth 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: and on the same day was the Sabbath. The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the Sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed. He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk? And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place. Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole. And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the Sabbath day.” John 5:1-17.

0.7 *Circumstances.*—Christ was attending the feast,

[*Note:* Trench (p. 265) and Taylor (p. 135) suppose this.]

probably the Passover.

No doubt many worshipers were passing in and out of the temple.

[[T]he antagonism of the Jewish officials to Jesus was only beginning ... (Taylor 144).]

Evidence of a growing prejudice against Christ had begun to appear.

It was the Sabbath day. The miracle was performed without request, Christ himself asking the impotent man if he would be made whole. No such statement as, “Thy sins are forgiven thee,” or “Go in peace,” was made. The miracle stands alone in this respect.

0.8 *Great Lesson*.—“Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.” The great lesson of this miracle is contained in the foregoing admonition. This man’s condition was probably due to his own sin, and the Saviour warned him not to continue in transgression, lest a worse affliction overtake him. The Master warned this man to sow no more for suffering and disease, lest a still more disastrous harvest of affliction overtake him. Transgression always precedes its penalty.

STUDY OF THE MIRACLE

1.1 *Having Five Porches*.—On this Sabbath day the Great Physician was found at the place where he was most needed; for the five porches around the sheep market at the Pool of Bethesda were in reality five wards of a *hospital* filled to overflowing with sick folk. There were five different porches full of people.

“THE *HOSPITAL* OF *WAITERS*
VISITED WITH THE GOSPEL”
(*Spurgeon* 199)

In almost any religious gathering to-day there may be found five porches of *waiting ones*,—five classes of careless, indifferent, or lukewarm souls.

I think I know enough to fill all the five porches (S1 200).

Some one has given the following classes:

[contd] Some are waiting for a *more convenient season*,

and they have a notion, perhaps, that this more convenient season will come to them on a sick bed, possibly, they even think, upon a dying bed. It is a great mistake (S1 200).

They always *reckon upon a good to-morrow*,

but to-morrow is a day which you will not find in the almanack; it is found nowhere but in the fool’s calendar (S1 200).

In a second porch a crowd of waiters are waiting *for dreams and visions* (S1 201).

[T]hey have a notion that perhaps one of these nights they will have such a vivid dream of judgment that they will wake up alarmed, or such a bright vision of heaven that they will wake up fascinated by it (S1 201).

A third porch full of people will be found waiting for a *sort of compulsion*. They have heard that those who come to Christ are drawn by the Spirit of God (S1 201).

A fourth porch is attractive to many people, especially at this peculiar time. They are *waiting for a revival* (S1 202).

Many are waiting in the porch of *expected impression*.

They want ... [the minister] to fix them, to shoot the arrow into their flesh, that they may be pierced in the heart—for this they are waiting (S1 202).

(1) those who are waiting for a *more convenient season*,—

always *reckoning on a fair “to-morrow,”*

though to-morrow is found only in the fool’s calendar;

(2) those who are waiting for things startling or wonderful;

(3) those who are waiting for the spirit to move them,—some *sort of sheer compulsion*;

(4) those who are *waiting for revival*;

and (5) those who are waiting for an *impression*.

SOURCE

“LESSONS FROM THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST”

They were not **looking to Jesus**, any of them (S2 203).

For all five classes the prescription is, Cease waiting, and come; look no longer at the pool,

but **look unto Jesus**.

“The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (S1 204).

“The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart.”

1.2 *Waiting for the Moving of the Water.*—

IX: THE IMPOTENT MAN AT THE POOL OF BETHESDA. (**Taylor** 134)

While this pool is perhaps a type of the healing and saving grace of Christ, there is this one great distinction:

In the medical spring around which these porches were reared, the healing virtue was only intermittent (T 146).

its virtues were intermittent,

But the efficacy of the blood of Christ is continuous.

while the stream that flows from the riven side of Christ is continual.

No one needs to wait a single moment for a cure from the Lord Jesus (T 146).

At any time, without the waiting of a moment, the sinner, the afflicted soul, may find relief in the stream that flows from Calvary.

Heaven's stream is continuous; salvation's waters are always troubled.

1.3 While the impotent man waited for the mysterious occasion that was supposed to impart healing power to the waters of the pool, the Divine Healer himself walked unnoticed and unrecognized among the sick ones.

And to-day many Christians seek for blessings which hang over their heads, vainly striving for victories, which, did they only believe, are already won,—waiting in darkness and despair for forgiveness and peace which are already theirs. Jesus says, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.”

“JESUS AT BETHESDA, OR WAITING
CHANGED FOR BELIEVING”
(Spurgeon2 165)

The devil’s delusion of waiting is one which he uses most frequently, and which meets with the greatest success.

When Satan is unable longer to deceive or delude an erring soul,

When the minister preaches with power,
and the hearer’s heart is touched,

when a sinner is about to turn to God,

then it is that the delusion of delusions—procrastination—is brought to bear upon the mind.

the devil says, “Wait for a more convenient season” (S2 168).

“Wait until to-morrow; not to-day; some other day.”

Any time will please the deceiver better than now;

[“To-day is the **accepted time**; today is the day of salvation” (S1 204).]

for “now,” the Lord has said, “is the **accepted time.**”

1.4 The Christian should wait, however long the time may be, until the Lord has spoken; but when the divine word has gone forth, we should no longer tarry. In the matter of forgiveness of sin, and the salvation of the soul, there is no need of waiting at any time; for Jesus said, “It is finished,” while on the cross.

SOURCE

[For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not (2 Cor. 8:12).]

“LESSONS FROM THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST”

The sinful soul needs only to have a willing mind, and that, the Lord has said, is acceptable. 2 Cor. 8:12.

The garment of the righteousness of Christ has been woven in the loom of heaven for every soul. Not one garment for all, but a perfect raiment for each one.

1.5 This poor sufferer was waiting for an angel when the Lord Jesus himself, the Commander of the angels, was by his side. How often, in our vain endeavor to secure some supposed blessing, we pass by, unrecognized, a greater blessing that the Lord had purposed to give us.

W. S. SADLER

HEALING THE IMPOTENT MAN AT BETHESDA (*Concluded*)

2.1 *Had an Infirmary Thirty and Eight Years.*—This was a case of extreme wretchedness. The man had been afflicted with this disease for thirty-eight years. It is a case illustrating the connection between sowing and reaping—sin and sickness. From the words which Jesus afterward spoke to him, we might judge that this man’s affliction was the direct result of his individual transgression. This poor soul was waiting, and had been waiting for years, at the pool,—waiting for some sign or wonder. He waited long; and this is true of every Christian who is waiting for unusual and extraordinary things to happen.

He must wait until the waiting itself has shown him the folly of waiting, or else fall a victim to the deceptive wonder-working of the arch-deceiver.

2.2 Jesus Saw Him Lie.—

“IMPOTENCE AND OMNIPOTENCE”
(Spurgeon3 177)

Jesus saw him lie there.

It is written that Jesus saw him lying there.

What an encouragement it should be to every suffering and afflicted soul to realize that

He sees you lie just where you are to-night, impotent, without hope, without light, without faith (S3 178).

Jesus sees those who lie upon beds of affliction.

Not only is that true, but Christ shares every sorrow and every pain with his suffering children.

“JESUS AT BETHESDA, OR WAITING
CHANGED FOR BELIEVING”
(Spurgeon2 165)

The Saviour selected that man out of the great multitude, we know not why, but certainly for a reason founded in grace.

The question may be asked,

Why did Jesus select this one man to be healed?

Divine Wisdom alone can answer;

If we might venture to give a reason for his choice it may be that he selected him because **his was the worst case**, and he had waited the longest of all.

but (1) might it not have been that **his was the worst case** of all,

This man's case was in everybody's mouth. They said, “This man has been there eight and thirty years” (S2 171).

he having been in that terrible condition thirty-eight years?

or (2) that Jesus knew his to be the only case that would be benefited spiritually by his physical restoration?

It is an encouraging thought for the soul in the slough of despond or the depths of despair, that Jesus is both able and willing to lay his healing hands upon even the worst cases.

2.3 *Wilt Thou Be Made Whole?*—

“A SINGULAR BUT NEEDFUL QUESTION” (Spurgeon 187)

[contd] Jesus spoke to the impotent man who had been afflicted for thirty-eight years, and enquired of him, “Wilt thou be made whole?” (S4 187)

Christ asked the sick man: “Wilt thou be made whole?”

This apparently singular question was full of meaning and significance.

It is not the same as this question,

Christ did not ask,

“Wilt thou be freed from pain?” “Dost thou desire to escape the inconveniences of thy affliction?” etc. His question was a simple, pointed one: “Wilt thou be made whole?” And in this question he asks of every inquiring soul to-day, “Dost thou desire simply to be free from the consequences of sin? Is thy repentance like unto Balaam’s, who repented only when he saw the drawn sword of the destroying angel?”

“Wilt thou be saved from going to hell?”

Dost thou repent to save thyself punishment by and by?

Everyone answers “Ay,” to that.

“Wilt thou be saved so as to go to heaven?”

Dost thou repent to gain future rewards?

At once, without deliberation, Everyone says, “Yes” (S4 188).

[The question] is, should we be willing to be made **mentally and morally** what Adam was before his sin brought disease into manhood? (S4 188)

Or hast thou seen the exceeding sinfulness of sin,

and wilt thou be made *whole*, physically, **mentally, and morally?**”

This is the question that Jesus asks every soul that seeks his face. What is your answer? Can you in sincerity answer, “Yes,” to the Master’s question? If you can, then with a willing heart you must walk in every ray of light that shines across your pathway; and with patience and diligence sow for physical and spiritual health; for true wholeness is only perfect health of body and perfect health of soul,—holiness unto the Lord.

2.4 Some who would be made whole are unwilling to pay the price of complete self-surrender. They are not willing to allow wholeness, which is only another word for holiness, to control their eating, their dressing, and their acting. He who would be made whole must forever give up the spirit of murmuring and the tendency to lukewarmness. He must put on the whole armor of God, and fight diligently the good fight of faith.

2.5 *Jesus Said, Rise, Take up Thy Bed, and Walk.—*

XXI: BETHESDA AND THE SANHEDRIN (**White** 201)

Jesus does not ask this sufferer

to exercise faith in Him.

Jesus did not ask this poor sufferer,

perhaps palsied and otherwise afflicted,

even to have faith in him.

SOURCE

“LESSONS FROM THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST”

He simply says, “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.”

He simply said, “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.”

But the man’s faith takes hold upon that word (W 202-03).

But the man had faith enough to take hold of the divine word,

Jesus had given him no assurance of divine help (W 203).

even though Jesus had given him no assurance of help.

Christ quickly disappeared from the man whom he had healed, and was not seen of him until later,

In the temple Jesus met the man who had been healed.

in the temple,

He had come to bring a sin offering and a **thank offering** for the great mercy he had received (W 204).

when he was making a **thank-offering** for the blessing of restored health.

He took up his bed and walked. This poor man obtained healing by *obedience*. The teaching that promises healing without obedience is a snare and a delusion. The evidence that this man was made whole lay in his immediate and implicit obedience to the Master’s command. The willingness to obey and carry out the Master’s orders was but a part of the cure which the Master had wrought, and which he foreshadowed in his question: “Wilt thou be made whole?”

2.6 He That Was Healed Wist Not Who It Was.—Very often men and women receive the benefit of light and truth concerning right methods of living,—health and dress reform,—to such an extent that they almost entirely regain their lost health. At the same time they seem in almost utter ignorance of many vital truths connected with that light which has so greatly benefited them.

Often the **medical missionary** discovers that the one who has been physically helped, like the subject of this miracle, knows nothing of the divine Master whose help he has received. This should not be regarded as discouraging; for if the benefited soul is sincere and in earnest, he will be given subsequent opportunities to learn more of the great Healer, and to accept additional light as fast as he is prepared for it.

2.7 Sin No More, Lest a Worse Thing Come unto Thee.—

It was here that Christ spoke to the restored man the words that contained the greatest **lesson** of the miracle. “Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.” When questioned why he carried his bed on the Sabbath day, he replied: “He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed and walk.”

Ignorant of the enmity toward Jesus,

he told the Pharisees who questioned him, that this was He who had performed the cure (W 204).

This man was ignorant of the enmity of the Jews and the Pharisees toward Jesus,

and he told them of his remarkable experience only to honor and glorify the one who had healed him.

2.8 The Jews found fault with Christ because he had healed on the Sabbath day. How singularly inconsistent to seek to accuse a man of doing good on the Sabbath day, when they themselves were violating the law in concocting miserable schemes for his persecution, and even for the taking of his life!

SOURCE

“LESSONS FROM THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST”

Christ says, in explaining his act to the infuriated Jews, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,” intimating that the creation which God gave existence to in six days’ work, he himself must uphold on the Sabbath; and that, in restoring life, in healing this poor man, Christ was but working in harmony with his Father, who, every Sabbath day, kept the man’s heart beating.

XV: THE HEALING OF THE
IMPOTENT MAN AT BETHESDA.
(Trench 262)

Christ’s work is but the reflex of his
Father’s work (Tr 276)

Christ’s work is but the reflex of his
Father’s work.

W. S. SADLER.