

Discipleship Group Weekly Resources

Week 3 Passage: John 5:1-30

Big Thought:

Jesus heals a paralytic. This is the third sign of Jesus performed in the gospel of John. During a Jewish feast, when Jerusalem was crowded with visitors, Jesus walked by the Pool of Bethesda and saw a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years lying there. Seeing the man there by the pool and knowing his story, Jesus asks a somewhat odd question: “Do you want to get well?” Why did He ask that? Is it not assumed that a paralytic of 38 years wants to be made well?

Turns out, this is a good question from Jesus because not everyone wants to get well. We struggle with change. Something as significant as being able to walk again would alter this man’s whole existence. Was he willing to make those changes? Was he willing to take responsibility for himself? Did he want to get a regular job and go to work every day? Could he endure the loss of his identity as a victim? Whether it is our physical, emotional, or spiritual health, Jesus’ question “do you want to get well?” is a very good question.

The man’s response was to explain that when the waters of the pool were stirred and healing was possible, he couldn’t get in the water fast enough before others to be healed. Jesus responds with healing: “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” The man begins to walk. It’s worth noting that John doesn’t mention anything about the faith of the man. Truthfully, he seems to be a bit confused by the whole situation and the controversy of his healing.

The controversy of this healing is rooted in the day of the healing: the Sabbath. The Jewish leaders were ticked to find out not only was this man healed on Sabbath, but he was healed by Jesus. The real issue was not working on the Sabbath; it was who Jesus was and where He got His authority. As the church father Augustine wrote, “They sought darkness from the Sabbath more than light from the miracle.”

The word “sign” is not found in this whole passage. In John, signs are miracles performed by Jesus to point beyond themselves to the source of His miraculous power. A miracle was performed here, but the people were so hard-hearted that they couldn’t see beyond the miracle to the miracle-worker. This is a case of what John says in chapter 1, verse 5, “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not understood it.”

There’s an important connection between last week’s story in chapter 4 of the royal official and this account of the Jewish leaders: both experienced miracles, both saw God’s power in Jesus to heal, both were faced with the reality of Jesus’ identity. Though they had similar experiences, they ended up with different conclusions. The sign of chapter 4 led to faith, but the miracle of chapter 5 hardened the hearts of the Jewish leaders. John leaves you to consider the two responses, how would you respond to God’s power at work in the world?

4 Questions:

1. Have you ever experienced a situation with a close friend or family member who did not want to get well (physically, emotionally, spiritually, relationally)? What is/was that experience like?
2. What areas of your life is Jesus asking the question “do you want to get well?” about?
3. Take some time to think about the last 3 months of your life. What signs of God’s power at work have you missed?
4. Think about Question 2, how can you practically respond this week to Jesus’ healing power to make you well?