

## Introduction

Eric Metaxas: In his best-selling book, *Miracles*, Eric Metaxas has what I think is perhaps the most compelling miracle in the whole book, *his own coming to faith in Jesus*. **He grew up Greek Orthodox, but his knowledge of God was vague and impersonal.** After a fine Yale degree in English, he found himself floundering as an aspiring fiction author, only to work at **Union Carbide proofing technical manuals.** A dead-end job, a dreary place, and his heart became desperate. Silently, he began reaching out to God and he would regularly listen to classic rock on his way to work. One day he felt as though his heart would burst and the **Led Zeppelin led by Robert Plant, he enjoyed the song "Heaven Knows."** He said he often wondered if God was trying to get through to him and one day—as he listened to that song Heaven Knows, he pulled into his parking space and cried out to God “Do you know? Are you there? If so, please let this same song be on when I come out of work.” He says, “Looking back on it, it’s embarrassing to think that I would make a silly request like this of God—but I needed a sign” as his heart reached out for the God he never knew. **8 hrs of fatiguing, tedious work later, he’d forgotten the request, came back out to his car, turned the key and flipped on the radio—and that song began to play again. He drove out of that cold, concrete parking garage with life and color and a song in his heart.** God was real, and God was listening and God was now his God. Through a Christian co-workers help, Eric Metaxas found Christ and his life has never been the same. Now, one of the best-selling Christian authors and radio hosts in the country.

**God still meets us in unexpected ways. He still invades our space and our hearts and reveals himself to men.**

**Main Thought: Miracles are revealing and provoking (both a revelation and a provocation): They reveal God’s character and ours. They provoke us to action—to trust God or harden our hearts further.**

**That is just the Big Idea that we’re going to encounter in our story today...**

## John 5:1-17

After this there was **a feast of the Jews**, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> Now there is in Jerusalem by the **Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda**, which has **five roofed colonnades**. <sup>3</sup> In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. <sup>5</sup> One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> When Jesus **saw him** lying there and **knew that he had already been there a long time**, he said to him, **“Do you want to be healed?”** <sup>7</sup> The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” <sup>8</sup> Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” <sup>9</sup> And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

Now that day was the Sabbath. <sup>10</sup> So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” <sup>11</sup> But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’” <sup>12</sup> They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’” <sup>13</sup> Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. <sup>14</sup> **Afterward Jesus found him in the temple** and said to him, **“See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.”** <sup>15</sup> The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. <sup>16</sup> **And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.** <sup>17</sup> But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

**Going Forward in John's Gospel:** Opposition to Jesus will center around three consecutive and amazing signs: The healing of the lame (ch. 5), the blind (ch. 9), and the dead (ch. 11).

### **The Setting of the Sign**

**The Festival:** John knows you already have Matthew, Mark, and Luke which detail Jesus' miracles in **the northern region of Galilee**—but he wants you to see what it was like for Jesus to minister in the often-hostile area of Jerusalem and Judea. So Jesus' activity most often takes place in this gospel around one of the **four Jewish festivals: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Hanukkah also)**.

**The pool of Bethesda** was called a made-up story, that is of course until Archeologists found it exactly where John says it was—by the Sheep Gate built by Zerubbabel under the direction of Nehemiah. John's knowledge of this proprietary detail is remarkable—this pool and the adjacent pool were **about a football field in length, surrounded by a portico or a covered porch supported by massive Roman style columns**.

**Let's take a few minutes and make some observations from the text...**

## 1. Jesus doesn't reserve restoration for the spiritually qualified or the well-connected.

In fact, I think we could say that he was looking for the man who was most in need.

What the story reveals about the paralytic:

- **He is utterly alone.** 5:7 **"Sir, I have no one..."**

**My Friend Fred: Fred was a** 48 yr old guy who was mentally delayed due to fetal alcohol syndrome. He had the mental development of probably a 5-year-old. He was crusty, flakey skin due to eczema, a little gray Members Only® jacket, hairy gray ears—and kind eyes full of the wonder of a child. I watched scores of people walk by him as he just sit there, and as far as I could tell—no one noticed him. I introduced myself and began a friendship with him. Fred trusted in Jesus for salvation and fell in love with our church—as our disciples reached out to him and included him in our discipleship programs I invited him over to our house for dinner later, and my home was the picture of activity. Little children running around whacking each other with light sabers and when I drove him home that evening his heart was full. His eyes full of tears and his heart full of joy.. At the end of dinner I drove him home, he lived in an apartment high rise downtown Spokane that was devoted to the mentally delayed folks, and he invited me up to see his view of the city. I asked him what he did with all his time and he told me "Oh nothing really. I just sit in my apartment by myself or on the balcony alone." I kept a good poker face, but my heart sank.

Imagine going through life without another human being in your life to help you, encourage you, care for you. Loneliness is on the rise in the US. We have more mind-blowing technology and gadgetry than ever before to keep us in the illusion that we are "connected" and we have never been lonelier. This man was utterly alone and we can hear the undercurrent of heartache in his statement. It could be that he outlived his family, it could have been that he was abandoned—but whatever the case is he has no one.

**The man was alone, surrounded by a multitude. Jesus "saw him" and Jesus "knew all about him"**

- **He is disillusioned.** 5:7b **"Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me."** By this time the man is disillusioned. He has no one who cares, no one who helps, and misses every opportunity. I have known a few people in my time who just for whatever reason are easy marks for the enemy and **discouragement**. No matter how much they've tried, wished, or prayed—things just don't turn out the way they'd hoped. **Disillusionment is a sure symptom that our trust is in the wrong object.**
- **He is superstitious**— 5:3-7 "In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, <sup>[b]</sup>paralyzed, <sup>[c]</sup>waiting for the moving of the water. <sup>4</sup>For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. <sup>5</sup>Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup>When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been *in that condition* a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" <sup>7</sup>The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up;

but while I am coming, another steps down before me.” (NKJV). There's a reason why the last part of vs. 3 and all of 4 are missing in the ESV and many modern translations. It's because that was added by a scribe hundreds of years later—the earliest most dependable manuscript copies of this story do not have that verse and a half in them. The scribe knows three things: **(1)** ubiquitous healing baths, **(2)** The sick around this pool, **(3)** the man's response about not being able to get into the pool when it is stirred, **(4)** this superstitious belief is corroborated by a second century letter in which a patron of this particular bath thanks the Roman emperor for providing it so that the gods can heal the sick.

- **He is a blame-shifter**—To his credit he obeys Jesus and after being healed, he gathers his mat and begins to walk through the temple. When stopped by the leaders of the Torah police for breaking their laws on the Sabbath, the man immediately shifts the blame for breaking this law to Jesus. 5:11 “But he answered them, ‘the man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘take up your bed and walk.’”
- **He is a sinner**—Jesus does not hesitate to confront him for his sin.
- **He becomes an informant** betraying Jesus to the religious authorities. 5:15-16 “The man went away and told the Jews it was Jesus who had healed him, and this is why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.”

This story is both a parallel and contrast to the Blind man in Ch. 9. **(1)** Jesus heals them both in the temple by a pool, **(2)** healing takes place on the Sabbath, **(3)** but the blind man receives and even defends Jesus. This man does no such thing.

What the story reveals about God:

**God's sovereignty in miracles:** This reveals God's sovereignty over miracles—for he does not just clear those porticoes out of all who are ailing. It also reveals the character of the recipients and the witnesses—which in this case are the Leaders.

**God's compassion for lonely, broken, and even hard-hearted individuals:** **Hear me well—sometimes a broken heart can become a hardened heart.**

People are a mixed bag, and God doesn't just reserve healing and the miraculous for those with **polished spiritual credentials**. But when he does reveal himself it also reveals the state of our own hearts...what will be our response?

## 2. Jesus challenges our faith in order to grow our faith.

- **1<sup>st</sup> Challenge: Do we really want to get well?** 5:6 “he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” **Do you know someone who doesn't want the consequences of their choices, or their situation—but they do not welcome the costs associated with leaving their state of dependence.**

**Background:** Beggary was better than starvation—but if you had spent the last 38 years of your life being an invalid, then to be suddenly healed would bring new responsibilities and new challenges and Jesus wasn't also offering manna from heaven till he died.

**Illus.** I talked to a friend who, before he was saved, was in and out of prison his whole life. When he'd get released, he'd go out, try to find a minimum wage job, get sick of that, and then intentionally do something to land back in Jail. I asked why he did that he responded, “It was a bed and food and a roof over my head.” *The fact is, in order to be released it required something of him.*

*Do you want to get well, do you want to go to work, do you want to not be a victim anymore?*

**Illus.** *If I may be frank, one of the most heartbreaking aspects* of being a pastor is to counsel someone, give them wise and biblical advice and scriptural principles and even a step-by-step process to leave their addiction, or self-made prison—and they don't receive it.

- **2<sup>nd</sup> Challenge: Do you want to grow?** 5:14 “Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” *When Jesus searches for him later, where does Jesus find the man?* Right back where he was. In the same place.

Jesus is never content to heal us but to sanctify us that we may grow spiritually. To leave sin and old patterns behind. To cast off the sin that so easily entangles.

Whatever the lame man's sin was, Jesus directly tied it to his condition.

**Illus.** *A kid I stayed with, Nigel in UK—had debilitating MS and could barely move from the shoulders down.* We got to talking and he confessed a rich fantasy life of being healed, getting on a plane and flying to America, and sitting by the pool in LA with his shades on surrounded by hot babes. I was like, “sorry man, America is really not like that.”

**Jesus doesn't just want to heal us but to sanctify us.**

- **3<sup>rd</sup> Challenge: Do you want to be free of heartless religion?** 5:9-10 “Now that day was the Sabbath. <sup>10</sup>So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” **Jesus could have healed him on any day. This is not a Mosaic command, nor is it found in the prophets. Jesus is confronting his trust in false, superstitious religion, and the Pharisees' trust in man-made regulations.**

**Jesus is challenging an established false religion, which is usually marked by:**

**(1) Focus on the Institution rather than the individual**—here is a human life touched by God, and they can't see past their petty legalisms.

**(2) Legacy systems**—these are inherited social behaviors that are old enough that no one can remember where they came from, but novel enough not to be remotely biblical. People raised in these systems are made to believe their religion has all the marks of antiquity, but is in reality shallow and novel. Sabbath: Ex. 16:23; 34:21; 35:3; Num. 15:32; Amos 8:5; Is. 58; Jer. 17:19-27; Neh. 10; 13. Sabbath prohibitions are explicitly **against carrying two things: any implements for your mercantile profession; and any accoutrements for setting up shop in the temple gate. They are all professional, or vocational.**

**(3) Legendary beliefs**—it begins with beliefs that are not verifiable, not historical, and frankly apocryphal and fictional. Once it becomes enshrined as an article of faith it is difficult to get people to let go of it.

**(4) Magisterial Authority Structures**—Authoritarian control is the name of the game in established false religion. *Instead of caring, loving, guiding, teaching, correcting and training the sheep—these authoritarian teachers seek to exert control over the people.*

Jesus is not only challenging the cultic beliefs of magical Bethesda waters, he is also challenging the ever-expansive tendencies of the rabbis to heap religious burdens on the people.

In this system people and their well-being are no longer the focus, but the institution becomes an end-in-itself. *Their function is no longer ministerial but magisterial.*

**Jesus did not come to save us to a new religion. He came to save us from slavish devotion to impotent, powerless, and man-made religion.**

#### Take Away Questions:

**Main Thought: Miracles are revealing and provoking (both a revelation and a provocation): They reveal God's character and ours. They provoke us to action—to trust God or harden our hearts further.**

#### Take Away Questions:

1. Is there a God-event, a miracle, or a need you have that only Jesus can meet today?
2. Do you feel underserving, alone, or perhaps disillusioned by religion? **You may have given up on religion, but don't give up on Jesus.**
3. Are you holding onto any "sacred" but false beliefs that are keeping you from Christ today?
4. Is there an identifiable pattern of sin that is holding you back from restoration and growth?

5. Are you ready to face the challenges that restoration can bring—the responsibilities and new opportunities that healing provides?