

## 10. John 5:1-18

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### Getting started

What is the most memorable/successful experience that you have had reading the Bible? Why did it 'work'?

### Observation and interpretation

#### Thinking about this study...

This study has a lot of questions to be answered or at least considered as you read through verse by verse. It is trying to replicate a close reading approach and ask some questions of you as a reader as you move through each verse. Some questions will seem trivial and others unanswerable (either not enough information in the text or too hard). Don't spend too much time discussing a particular question and also don't worry too much if you have to leave a question 'unresolved' along the way. Perhaps a way to do this would be for one person to have the questions and everyone else simply have their Bibles open in front of them.

#### Read verse 1

What feast is in mind?

Have any other feasts of the Jews been mentioned in the Gospel so far? (see John 2:13)

What happened last time Jesus was in Jerusalem and met 'the Jews' (see 2:12-23, especially verse 20)? What is the effect of calling it a 'feast of the Jews'?

#### Read verses 2-3

Read the following brief excerpt of material about the pool. What is the effect of the amount of detail in the description of the pool and surrounds in the passage in John?

#### Some Background: The Pool

External evidence confirms the existence of the pool that John writes about. One of the Dead Sea Scrolls mentions the pool's title 'by Bethesdatayin, in the pool where you enter is a smaller basin'. The pool is near the 'sheep gate'. The Sheep Gate is a gate in the north-eastern wall of the Temple. Sheep for the sacrificial offerings were probably led through this gate into the temple. Excavation beneath St Anne's monastery in the early twentieth century revealed twin pools that most identify as the pool in John 5. The pools were approximately as big as a football field and 6 m deep. The five porticoes made up a porch on each of the four sides of the pool and one separating them.

### *Read verses 5-6*

What happened to verse 4?

How would you explain this 'phenomenon' in a Parish Bible study?

What is your response to the information given about the man?

Does the number 38 resonate with any other biblical numbers?

What do you think of Jesus' question to the man?

Is there any reason a sick person might not want to get well (both then and now)?

### *Read verse 7*

What does this verse suggest about the man's illness?

What do you think of his answer to Jesus' question – is it a yes or no?

How does this answer help to explain the riddle of the missing verse 4?

### *Read verses 8, 9*

What do you think of the 'miracle'?

What is missing if you compare this to a similar kind of healing in the other Gospels?

What does this tell us about Jesus' power in this kind of situation?

What did you think/how did you feel when you were told that this incident took place on a Sabbath?

Why do you think John holds this piece of information back so long?

### *Read verses 10-13*

What do you think of the Jews' statement in verse 10?

Who do you think 'the Jews' are?

Why do you think the man doesn't know Jesus' name?

Why do you think Jesus is described as having 'slipped away' into the crowd?

What impression do you have of Jesus at this point?

### *Read verses 14, 15*

Why do you think Jesus finds the man again?

What do you think Jesus means by what he says to the man, what are the possibilities?

What do you think was the man's 'sinning'?

Did it cause his illness or is he doing something wrong now as well?

Do you think bad things can happen to people because they sin?

What other evidence is there in the Bible for thinking about this?

How do you feel about the man who has been healed at the end of verse 15?

The word translated 'told' in this verse is also used in John 4.25 (NIV: 'declared', 16.13 'tell you', 14, 15 'make known to you'): does this suggest anything about the man's statement?

*Read verses 16 -18*

**Some Background: The Sabbath and God 'working'**

Behind Jesus' statement in verse 16 is a long running discussion amongst Jewish Rabbi's concerning God's work on the Sabbath. According to Gen 2.2-3 God finished his work of creation and rested. He then keeps the Sabbath law. But if he rests entirely from his work then who keeps the universe running while he rests? If he 'works' on the Sabbath then has he in fact broken his own law? A number of different solutions were offered including the fact that the universe is God's domain and that he therefore never carries anything outside of that is therefore free to do what he likes; God's work of creation ceased but his work of judging continued. However it was worked out, all agreed that God works continuously.

Note the escalation in the Jews response to Jesus in these verses. What causes this escalation?

What is the thrust of Jesus' reply to the Jews?

What is the Jews' problem with Jesus apparently making himself equal to God?

*Summing up:*

Choose three words that describe Jesus, the man who was healed, and the Jews after reading this account. (You could do this as a group on a larger piece of paper)

Jesus

The man who was healed

The Jews

What questions remain unanswered for you at the end of this particular narrative?

## **Implications**

1. What insights could you use from this passage in a pastoral ministry setting?
2. How do you respond to questions about the healing power of Jesus today?