

"The Pool of Bethesda"

This wasn't my most productive week. I found myself particularly distracted for one reason or another, and I had a difficult time in regards to working on this sermon. Just choosing what scripture to use this week was a behemoth of a task. So eventually I picked this scripture basically by closing my eyes and pointing to a random part in the bible.

But once I had the scripture I found myself with another problem that was just as difficult, maybe even more so. I have the scripture, but now I needed the sermon. Everytime I tried to put pen to paper nothing of any value or interest came out. Then I remembered a story, one that I hadn't heard since I was about 12.

It was a story my very first youth director Jonny Drew told me. Now I couldn't really remember all of the details, but I knew the overall theme of the story. This scripture reading this morning reminded me of that story, but I was so frustrated because I couldn't remember any of the details. So I despite not having talked to Jonny in almost 12 years I reached out to him to see if he could tell me the story again.

I figured there wasn't a good chance that I would even get a response from Jonny after all this time and there was even worse chance of him remembering the story. He did both.

In the early 90's, a pastor was serving at a church in Texas. It was a good church, and he had served them for some time. But he caught the flu, and it somehow penetrated the myelin sheath of his vocal chords, it enveloped the surrounding nerves, and damaged the tissue beyond repair.

Over the next three years, he saw a number of specialists, but nothing anyone did could help. So he was left with a voice that screeched like nails on a chalkboard.

His church was patient with him and his disability, but what do you if you're a pastor and you can't talk? He resigned the following year and moved to Houston, where his wife became the primary breadwinner of the family. He got a job as a private investigator, where he didn't have to talk, but he longed to serve, someday, in the ministry again.

The following year, when a church's regular Bible Study leader had to take some time away, members asked if he could fill in instead. When he said he was just too hard to understand, they said, "Then we'll listen REALLY carefully."

Then came that day. When he was supposed to teach that class. At the time, he was in deep depression. Two days before, he said, he had sat for hours in his living room with no hope and no reason to live.

But he was scheduled to teach that Sunday and couldn't find a substitute, so he decided to at least show up. His teachings were indifferent and apathetic, nothing more.

And as he began his outline, he discussed the word "all." He said it meant "every single one, without exception." "Christ forgave *all* our sin—it's what makes the good news great," he said. He had no problem talking about that.

But when he began to talk about healing, he said, "I still believe God heals." But as he said those words, he thought, "But why not me?" He



moved through it as best as he could, and then began his third thought—  
“He redeems my life from the pit.”

He said, “I have had, and you have had, pit experiences.” But on that word, “pit,” the pressure that had been on his throat for three years was suddenly gone, as if someone had removed their hand from choking him. He paused, then continued, startled, “We’ve all had times when our life seemed to be in a pit, in a grave, and we didn’t have an answer for the pit we find ourselves in.”

And while he was speaking, his voice *returned*. His three-years of laryngitis were gone. And he thought, “Is this what I think it is?”

When he saw his doctor a few days later, there was no evidence that he even had a problem. His voice was completely restored.

He said, “If God could do that for me, He can solve whatever problem you have in your life. He loves you every bit as much as He loves me.”

Looking in John we read of this feast of the Jews and because of this Jesus comes to Jerusalem. And somewhere near an entrance to the city

known as the “Sheep Gate” we read of a pool. This pool that had these 5 roofed colonnades was place where people society deemed as invalid came. The blind, the lame, the paralyzed.

John tells us that one man had been at this pool for 38 years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, He asked him, ‘Do you want to be healed?’”

To give you a little context, only days before, Jesus had said to a man named Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” And He said, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son.” Then, in Samaria, He said to a woman at a well, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give Him will never be thirsty again.” And in Cana of Galilee, He healed a nobleman’s son.

Now here in chapter 5, as John wrote in verse 1, there was a feast of the Jews, so Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool” but just to clarify what the sheep gate is,

In Bible times, there were as many as twenty different gates, twenty different ways to enter the city. There was the “East Gate,” where Jesus entered on Palm Sunday. There was the “Beautiful Gate,” where Peter and John once healed a lame man. There was the “Lion’s Gate,” where Stephen was stoned. And there was a “Horse Gate,” and a “Fish Gate,” and a “Dung Gate,” which, appropriately so, led out to the city dump.

And here, we read of the “Sheep Gate.” It was near the temple, where lambs were led for sacrifice.

And as John wrote, by the Sheep Gate there was a pool. In Aramaic, it was called Bethesda.

People like that word, “Bethesda.” I have heard of an insurance company called that. I’ve also heard of churches and nursing homes



being named this. Bethesda translates to English, “house of mercy” and “house of grace.”

And as it says in verse 3, beneath its five roofed colonnades, there “lay a multitude of invalids; blind, lame, and paralyzed.”

Can you imagine the scene? Can you imagine the smell?

First, there was the overwhelming odor of wet wool from the best of Israel’s lambs and sheep; bathed, trimmed, shorn, and prepared for sacrifice. Then came the aroma of bread and breakfast cooked over an open fire. And last, there was the stench of sick, unwashed, diseased human bodies like a sick bay or hospital ward.

And why was Jesus there? Why wouldn’t He be there? After all, that’s what He once said to the Pharisees—“It’s not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.”

And when you think of the Pool of Bethesda, what image comes to mind? Are you thinking a cool, crystal clear, pool with composed of rocks that are so perfectly composed it appears irresistible? Think again.

It probably resembled the Ohio river more closely than any backyard swimming pool.

And as John writes in verse 5: “One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.”

Let me stop there for just a moment to let that sink in—*thirty-eight years*. For us, that’s 1981, back when Ronald Regan was president, Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister, and someone once told me that gas only cost 86 cents a gallon back then. That’s a long time!

Then, in verse 6, “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?’”

That’s kind of an odd question, don’t you think? “Do you want to be healed?” He’s been sick for thirty-eight years hanging out at the pool of the Bethesda. Of course, he wants to be healed!

But hidden behind that question were two more— “Do you still trust in God or have you lost all hope?”



Then verse 7: “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.”

You see at the time, the people believed that, once a year, an angel came down from heaven and stirred the waters of the pool. And just as soon as the water stirred, the first one in could be healed.

Imagine if you sat in a doctor’s office for thirty-eight years and, once a year, a nurse came out and said, “Who’s next?” And everyone made a mad dash to the door.

But in that moment, with eight simple words, Jesus showed Himself to be the Great Physician, the Divine Healer, the Lord of heaven and earth. He said, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” And in that moment, as he took up his bed and walked, his life was never the same.

Phil Callaway is an award-winning author, speaker, and father of three. He’s written twenty-five books that typically are targeted to audiences of Christian young adults.

One day while he was writing in his office, the phone rang. There was silence at first, then his wife's voice, speaking words he would never forget. She said, "Help me, please help me. I don't know what's happening!"

Normally it's a five minute jog from his office to his house. That day he made it in two. Bursting through the front door, he found his wife lying on the living room couch, with a deep gash running up her leg and blood staining the carpet. Staring at him with vacant eyes, she asked, "What day is it? It's Monday, right?"

It was a Friday..

Until that day, life had been everything they had hoped for. They had three children in three years, and couldn't have been happier. Until her fall and her diagnosis—Huntington's disease.

Four years later, after seeing twenty-one specialists and scouring libraries for any information they could find, and his wife weighing

barely ninety pounds, he prayed, “What do I do now, Lord? Where do we go from here?”

“But there was only silence,” he said. “The windows of heaven seemed shut, the drapes pulled.”

Finally, a doctor’s name came to mind, a member of his church. A few minutes later he called him on the phone.

“I’ve seen this once before,” he said. “Bring her to me first thing in the morning. There’s a new drug to treat it.”

A week later, she was a different person. The seizures ended. God had given him his wife back.

He said, “I’m thankful that in the toughest of times, God’s grace can help us choose joy over bitterness, and help us stay together when our whole world is falling apart.”

So what does all this mean for us?



I'll leave you with just one thing. Remember the question Jesus asked?

As He knelt down beside him, that invalid of thirty-eight years, He asked, "Do you want to be healed?"

This is a very personal question, that we have to ask ourselves. Do *you* want to be healed? Do you want to be rid of your guilt, your anger, your bitterness, your shame? Or do you want to hold it and keep it inside?

If you want to be healed, and I hope you do, then turn boldly to God because only He will make you whole again.

Amen