

# Epiphany #3: Healing at the Pool

## John 5 v 1-15

### Context:

One of the highlights of our regular Holy Land Pilgrimages is a visit to the Pools of Bethesda. Located in the NE quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, accessed through St Stephen's Gate (also known as the Lion's Gate), pilgrims can see the ancient ruins of the pools mentioned in John 5 and visit St Anne's Church which boasts the finest acoustics in all Israel. As we sing: "*He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister His grace*" the sound of our voices literally bounces off the walls and echoes spine-tinglingly around this ancient place of worship.

John tells us that, after an unspecified time in Galilee and during an unspecified Jewish feast, Jesus comes to Jerusalem and visits the Pools of Bethesda where he performs a truly stunning and controversial miracle. Let's mingle with the crowd by the pool and see what happens.

### Observation:

1. Where was the Pool of Bethesda located and how does John describe its structure (v 2)?
2. Who used to lie around the sides of the pool (v 3)?
3. What was the condition of the man Jesus singles out and what does Jesus ask him (v 5-6)?
4. How does the man respond to Jesus' question (v 7)?
5. What does Jesus tell the man to do and how does the man respond to Jesus' command (v 8-9a)?
6. On what day did this healing take place and why was this a problem to some of the Jews (v 9b-10)?
7. Who does the man blame (v 11) and what do the Jews then ask him (v 12)?
8. Why did the man not know who had healed him (v 13)?
9. Where did Jesus find the man later and what did he tell him (v 14)?
10. What did the man then do (v 15)?

### Meaning:

**NOTE:** Bethesda comprised 2 connected pools surrounded by 5 covered colonnades and, being located between the Sheep Gate and the Temple, it was used by pilgrims to wash their sheep before taking them for sacrifice. The waters often bubbled and stirred, probably due to some kind of thermal mineral spring, and the waters of the pool were therefore also associated with healing. Superstition credited angels with the stirring of the waters and tradition suggested that the first person into the pool when the waters bubbled would be healed.

1. Why do you think Jesus singled out this *particular* man from the many blind, lame and paralysed people who were lying there (v 3-5)?
2. What do you think was behind Jesus' question to the man in v 6?
3. How do you think the man must have been feeling in his reply to Jesus in v 7?
4. What do v 8-9 tell us about the power of Jesus as opposed to superstition?
5. The man's mat could be rolled up and carried on the shoulder (a bit like a Pilates mat today), but to carry it on a Sabbath day was against the Jewish Law (v 10) as interpreted by the religious elders, though strictly speaking not against God's commands in the Old Testament. Work was heavily regulated on the Sabbath – there were 39 categories of work that were

forbidden by the Scribes. Why do you think these Jews were more concerned about the man breaking one of *their* laws rather than rejoicing that he had been healed?

6. Why do you think Jesus seemed shy to take public credit for the healing (v 13)?
7. The Bible teaches that *all* suffering is an *indirect* consequence of sin (Genesis 3), and it also teaches that *some* suffering is a *direct* consequence of sin (see Acts 5:1-11, 1 Corinthians 11:20-22 & 28-32, Revelation 2:20-22). How does this help us to understand Jesus' words in v 14? Which of these two do you think applied in this man's case?
8. What is the '*something worse*' that Jesus refers to in v 14 (see Luke 13 v 1-5 & 2 Thessalonians 1 v 6-10)?
9. John calls this miracle, and every miracle he records in his Gospel, a 'sign'. Why do you think he does this and what do you think he wants us to learn about Jesus by doing so?

### Application:

1. Is there a danger that, for some people, their sickness and problems become such a large part of their identity that they don't seem to want to get better, as was possibly the case with the lame man? Why is this?
2. Why are superstitions so dangerous? What kinds of superstitions exist today, even among Christians? Are there any superstitions you are holding on to which Jesus is calling you to ditch in favour of trusting in him alone?
3. How do man-made religious traditions (e.g. Scribal Sabbath laws) sometimes get in the way of what Jesus wants to do in our lives? Can you think of any examples today? Are there any man-made religious traditions Jesus is calling you to ditch?
4. How can I make sure the '*something worse*' that Jesus referred to doesn't happen to me?

### Pray:

- For those known to us who are sick and suffering.
- For those known to us who follow superstition or man-made religion rather than Jesus.
- For God's grace to continue believing in Jesus, the only sure way to avoid the '*something worse*' of the eternal future.