

The Fields pt3

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The Fields / John 5:1–17

I vividly remember the day James came to church for the first time years ago. He kept looking up while I was talking to him. Scott had been inviting James for awhile, but he finally was willing to come and give it a shot. I finally asked him, “Is there something on the ceiling?” And he looked at me dead serious and said, “No, I just fully expected the roof to cave in the moment I walked in to church.”

I laughed.

There are fewer people like James now than at any time in American history. And Gallup released a new survey last month that shows church attendance at 10% lower than in 2012....measuring 31% in their May survey. And before you immediately go to virtual as the reason...virtual church attendance is dropping like a stone...down to 5% in the latest survey. And it is included in that number.

So what are we going to do?

I mean we can throw up our hands and say all is lost. We can keep meeting and hope that people find us. But, based on trend data, that's not going to happen. We are going to have to do what Scott did...we are going to have to go where people are and meet them there before they will EVER come here...and they might be watching the roof when they come in.

Jesus did this...all the time. Turn with me to [John 5:1-17](#).

Jesus has been out of Jerusalem, but He makes His way back there and He does not go to the temple this time. He goes somewhere else. To a pool where the hopeless gather.

John 1–11 (2) The Healing at Bethesda (5:2–9a)

When Jesus went to Jerusalem, he did not spend his time in elite hostels; nor did he concentrate his ministry merely in the temple or give attention to the rich and famous who could help him politically and financially with his ministry. He concentrated on people in need, which for the elite of society was part of his problem. In this story he visited the pool below the temple where the helpless dregs of society lay in a pathetic state. Most “proper” people probably avoided places where they had to pass among the sick and suffering both because it was an uncomfortable setting and because of the potential for violation of ritual purity rules. But Jesus went out of his way to visit such a place

Now for just a moment, I want you to consider something with me. Where is the place that followers of Jesus are least likely to be in our day and time?

This would be one of those places.

The people who are at this pool have given up on anything else other than waiting on a miracle to save them. They are beyond hope in their own minds. Day after day they gather waiting on an event that occurs irregularly and with varied effectiveness.

John 1–11 (2) The Healing at Bethesda (5:2–9a)

In terms of an explanation it is possible that the man’s theory here may have been based on the occurrence of an interesting natural phenomenon in which at high water times the pool apparently was infused by a periodic influx of spring water that stirred the pool with excess water. The question here is not one of the possibility of miracle

Church there are a lot of people in our city and state who do the same thing. They just aren't at a pool. They are seeking what they think can save them- a relationship, a windfall, a surgery, a letter back from the government, a parole hearing...list could go on forever.

Their lives are on hold like Springsteen sings...countin on a miracle...

Here is the truth...the people at this pool are never going to meet Jesus if He does not go where they are...they are physically incapable of doing so.

There are people in your world that are never going to darken the door of this church to hear the message of the Gospel...yet they are people Jesus died for. We are going to have to go to them, where they are, countin on their miracle...

When Jesus arrives He sees this guy who may be among the most hopeless- 38 years of being an invalid.

Guy was totally dependent on everyone else for 38 years. Imagine the frustration, the anger, the humiliation...the hopelessness.

John 1–11 (2) The Healing at Bethesda (5:2–9a)

Jesus went out of his way to visit such a place, and he found there a paralytic, helpless man, who had experienced the wilderness of abandonment for what seemed to have been an eternity: thirty-eight years (5:5). The same apparent feeling of an eternity seems to have been present in Israel's almost endless wilderness wandering experiences (thirty-eight years) from Kadesh to the brook Zared (cf. Deut 2:14). It would be difficult to argue for certain that John intended such an immediate comparison of the two time periods because there is no such direct textual reference made here in the passage. But it is suggestive. **All who experience hopelessness understand how time seems to hang like an eternity**

Jesus goes to him and asks a single question- “Do you want to be healed?”

And he gets a full blast of all of that in reply...

For all of you who have wrestled with times where you have vented at God...take comfort...this guy, he is on one...and Jesus does not flinch.

But the guy does not answer the question. He thinks he is beyond help...beyond saving.

John 1–11 (2) The Healing at Bethesda (5:2–9a)

The man’s response to Jesus’ question, “Do you want to get well?” (v. 6), revealed both **his poor understanding of God and his sense of hopelessness**. Instead of answering the question, he gave his gloomy testimony and his perception of how God works. The only hope evident in his testimony was his commitment to a myth of a periodic miraculous troubling of the pool, which allegedly brought healing to the first person able to jump in

Church, when we venture beyond the safe walls of our tribe, we are going to meet people who will put us on blast, and worse. The frustration they have with themselves, God, church, faith, religion, etc is going to come spilling out on us. Talking to people on the edge is not easy...but with the right heart it is powerful.

John 1–11 (2) The Healing at Bethesda (5:2–9a)

Over the long period of time of living with his problem the man had seemingly become convinced that God operated on the basis of “first come, first served.” Another of his problems was that he undoubtedly felt a sense of abandonment because of his helpless condition and his lack of support from others, particularly in times when he thought healing might be possible. He apparently had become negative

They expect you to turn away...don't. Sit with them in the pit.

So after this guy is done pouring out his full measure on Jesus, **Jesus simply tells him to get up and take a walk and to take his bed with him because he will not be living here anymore.**

Freedom has come.

And the guy is healed...He takes Jesus at His word and walks away.

There is one other thing I should caution you about in regards to leaving the comfort of the tribe to reach people...there are gonna be some folks who are NOT happy with who you are reaching and how you are doing it. And they may get big mad.

That is who the man encounters...the religious police...he is not doing it right! He is carrying his bed on the Sabbath (explain Sabbath law) and then they find our Jesus was healing on the Sabbath...BIG MAD!

John 1–11 (3) The Sabbath, the Man's Defense, and the Rise of Conflict (5:9b–29)

The point is that this statement should strike the reader with the force of a bomb. In music it would be like a powerful discord. The story had been a wonderful example of the graciousness of God in Jesus. At this point, however, the dark side of the story is introduced. The opponents of Jesus, here designated purposely as "the Jews," pounced on the helpless man who had just experienced the incredible joy of entering the promised land of a new existence.

John 1–11 (3) The Sabbath, the Man's Defense, and the Rise of Conflict (5:9b–29)

The Jews in this story were not interested in the well-being of people but merely in their rules and traditions

John 1–11 (3) The Sabbath, the Man’s Defense, and the Rise of Conflict (5:9b–29)

All they could see was a man carrying a bedroll and breaking the Sabbath law, **defined for us by a later Mishnaic codification (cf. m. Šabb. 7.2, the rule against carrying goods), which was formulated to support their understanding of the Torah principle**

Church let me be plain, if we start doing this, we are going to draw the ire of religious people. Some of you have already experienced that. Friends who attend other churches come here and they are uncomfortable...the building is small, there are people here who aren’t typical, respectable church goers. We are loud and boisterous. **But if you, as an individual, start going to places where the hopeless gather they are going to start whispering about you. Are you losing your faith? Backsliding? Are you becoming...a “liberal.”**

They will get big mad. And then we have to make a choice. **Who are we seeking to please- people or Jesus?**

Why did the man carry his bed on the Sabbath? Jesus told him to and since Jesus had set him free, he was going to listen to Him, not some dusty old religious guys who had never lifted a finger to help him in 38 years. *You don’t think in 38 years all those Pharisees could not have come and spent one day at the pool to try and help the guy in?*

Remember that...when the religious come at you, there are mad at Jesus. **They want Him for themselves as a tool, not as a Boss.** If they wanted Him as a Boss, they would be where you are.

And remember where they are- when Jesus is at the pool, they are ignoring all the needs at that pool. We can be where Jesus was or where the religious people are, but we cannot be in both places at once.

If the religious people had been sincere, there would have been no one at the pool without someone trying to help them to be saved...they were not there because they did not care.

Jesus went because He cared.

Now here is another amazing moment...Jesus knows the guy has been confronted, so He goes and finds Him again. Jesus is not going to leave this man to the wolves, but He is also not going to let him think that his healing is his spiritual transformation. **Jesus wants more for this man...not just the first step, but all the steps, full devotion, not a return to the bitterness he had harbored at the pool.** (v14)

John 1–11 (3) The Sabbath, the Man’s Defense, and the Rise of Conflict (5:9b–29)

In this story Jesus found the man in the temple, a place where in his hopeless state he would have found little welcome but in his healed state was now able to enter. Moreover, Jesus addressed him in his healed state: “Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you” (5:14). These words are not meant to be a cause-and-effect statement related to his sickness or paralysis. Such a direct identification between personal sin and illness, which was proposed by the disciples in the story of the blind man (9:2), was firmly rejected by Jesus (9:3). **The statement of cause and effect in this story, therefore, must be taken as referring to the eschatological correlation between sin and judgment that undoubtedly is the meaning of “something worse” in Jesus’ warning to the paralytic**

We are not just going to people to meet their momentary needs- just like we talked about last week- we are beginning a relationship that starts with the need of the moment and grows from there.

v16- and the Jewish leaders, now knowing who Jesus is, come at Him...quit doing this on the Sabbath...

And Jesus response to them is that He is going to work where God is working.

We should be the same way.

Henry Blackaby said, “Watch to see where God is working and join Him in His work.” That is what Jesus is saying. Church God is working...and often in the margins...we need to join Him there.

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