

Small Group Guide

Signs Series - Week 4: The Man at the Pool (John 5:1-18)

OVERVIEW

This week's sermon examined the healing of a man who had been disabled for 38 years at the Pool of Bethesda. Through this sign, John reveals a Jesus who pursues the hopeless, replaces broken human systems with divine grace, and declares himself equal with the Father. The greatest miracle is not that a paralyzed man walked, but that Christ himself comes looking for helpless sinners.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Jesus pursues those who cannot help themselves. The man at the pool never called for Jesus. Jesus initiated everything, which is a picture of God's grace toward us.
- Jesus replaces human systems with divine grace. The man's hope was fixed on a system that could never truly heal him. Jesus made that system irrelevant with a single word.
- The word of God creates what it commands. Jesus did not ask the man to try. He simply spoke, and the command itself created the ability to obey.
- Religion, when it becomes an end in itself, causes us to miss what God is doing. The religious leaders saw a man walking who had been paralyzed for 38 years and responded with criticism rather than wonder.
- This sign reveals Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath and giver of life. By saying "my Father has been working right up until now and I am working too," Jesus placed himself within uniquely divine activity and declared himself equal with God.
- Every healing on this side of eternity is temporary. Each miracle is a sign pointing to the greatest miracle: that through faith in Christ, those who are spiritually dead can be made alive in him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Opening

1. When you hear the word "hope," what comes to mind first? Share something you have hoped for over a long period of time. What did that waiting feel like?

Digging Into the Text

2. Read John 5:1-9. Jesus asked the man, "Would you like to get well?" rather than simply healing him. Why do you think Jesus asked that question? What does the man's response reveal about his state of mind after 38 years?
3. The sermon pointed out that the Pool of Bethesda was a pagan shrine, not a place God had prescribed, and that there is no evidence anyone was ever truly healed there. Yet the man had been waiting there for 38 years. What does that say about how we can sometimes place our hope in things that cannot actually save or heal us?
4. The sermon described how the religious leaders responded to the miracle with concern about a Sabbath violation rather than with wonder at what had happened. Have you ever seen religious routine or tradition cause someone, including yourself, to miss what God was actually doing? What did that look like?
5. Read John 5:17-18. Jesus said, "My Father has been working right up until now and I am working too." The religious leaders understood immediately that he was claiming equality with God. How does this declaration change the way you understand the miracle that had just taken place?

Going Deeper

6. The sermon said, "Our identities can become wrapped up in our wounds." In what ways do we, as individuals or as a culture, tend to identify ourselves by our brokenness rather than by what Christ has done and is doing in us? How does the gospel challenge that tendency?
7. The sermon drew a contrast between how the world operates, where the fastest and strongest win and supply is limited, and how the kingdom of God operates, where grace comes looking for the helpless and God's supply is unlimited. Where in your life do you feel pressure to strive in your own strength rather than rest in Christ's?
8. The sermon said, "His word creates the ability to obey." How does that truth change the way you approach areas of your life where you feel stuck or where you have been striving in your own effort?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- **Identify your pool.** Take an honest look at where you have been placing your hope. Is there a habit, a relationship, a system, or a strategy you have been trusting in that has not been healing or freeing you? Bring that before God this week and ask him to speak into it.

- **Pray for someone who has lost hope.** Think of one person in your life who seems worn down by a long struggle. Commit to praying for them specifically this week and consider reaching out to let them know someone sees them.
- **Examine your religious routines.** Ask yourself honestly whether any of your spiritual habits have become ends in themselves rather than means of encountering God. Invite the Holy Spirit to show you where routine may have replaced genuine responsiveness to what God is doing.
- **Meditate on one word from God.** Choose one promise or command from Scripture that speaks directly to an area where you feel paralyzed. Sit with it throughout the week. Ask God to let his word create in you what it commands.
- **Rest intentionally.** The sermon touched on the concept of Sabbath as an acknowledgment that God sustains all things even when we stop striving. Practice one intentional act of rest this week as an act of trust, acknowledging that God is at work even when you are not.

CLOSING PRAYER POINTS

- Thank God that he pursues us even when we are not looking for him.
- Ask for eyes to see where you have been trusting in things that cannot save.
- Pray for anyone in the group carrying a long-standing burden, illness, or struggle.
- Ask God to keep your heart soft and responsive so that religious habit never causes you to miss what he is doing.
- Pray for the mission team in Brazil, that God would work miracles through them and in them.