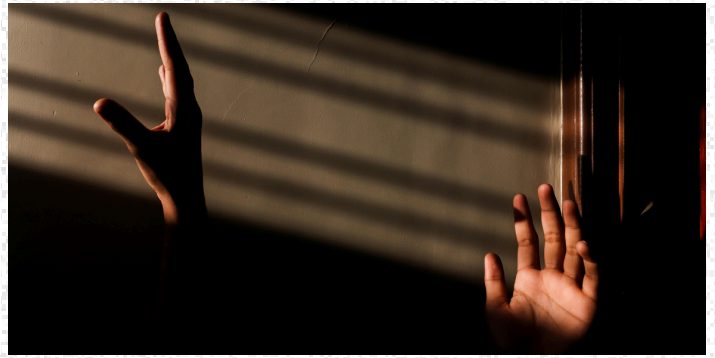


JESUS AND THE MAN BY THE POOL



Take a moment to imagine having to spend an entire day being paralyzed.

For the majority of this day, you are practically glued to a roughly made mat that's pressed against a damp stone. As you lie there, you're surrounded by a symphony of groans and cries from a hundred other broken bodies. Your head hurts from smelling the bitter tang of stagnant water hanging thick in the air.

Then all of a sudden, you hear a gurgling sound coming from a rippling pool in front of you. Every one of those broken bodies around begins to crawl on top of each other to reach the pool—leaving you behind, or sometimes at the very bottom of the pile. Imagine spending an entire day like this. The man in John 5 likely spent the vast sum of his days exactly like that. For thirty-eight years, this was how this man survived.

Thirty-eight years, never learning how to balance on his own two legs. Thirty-eight years, experienced between the narrow dimensions of a woven mat. Thirty-eight years, tasting dust and sweat. Thirty-eight years of saying, “Maybe this will be the year.”

When Jesus enters the scene, there are two key details that happen before he does his “Jesus thing” and heals this man:

*“When Jesus **saw** him lying there and **learned** that he had been in this condition for a long time...”*

He didn't just glance in his direction; he saw him. He perceived the layers of history worn into that mat. He weighed the decades of disappointment anchoring those useless legs to the damp stone. Jesus looked past the teeming mass of brokenness filling those five colonnades and locked his gaze onto a single, forgotten statistic.

But Jesus didn't just see the man—Jesus learned how long he had been there. He took the time to understand the depth of the man's isolation. He allowed the weight of those thirty-eight years to register.

In a world that fast-forwards through other people's pain, Jesus paused the tape. He didn't treat the man as an inconvenience to bypass or a theological puzzle to solve. He honored his history.

“Do you want to get well?”

To a man who has been trapped for nearly four decades, the answer seems obvious. But thirty-eight years of being forgotten does something cruel to the human heart—it paralyzes hope long before it paralyzes the body

The man doesn't answer with a "yes." Instead, his mind immediately goes to his lack of a support system: "Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred." He was trapped in a cycle of being left behind, utterly convinced that his healing depended on a crowd that would always outrun him and a system that would always exclude him. He had accepted the narrative that he was entirely on his own.

But the Divine was kneeling in the dust beside him.

The eyes we default to in our daily lives are usually hyper-focused on our own schedules, our own agendas, and our own circles of comfort.

When we encounter chronic, long-term brokenness—whether it's a family member trapped in a cycle of addiction, a friend drowning in years of depression, or a neighbor dealing with an ongoing crisis—our instinct is often to look away. Chronic pain is messy. It doesn't fix easily. It requires us to slow down. But slowing down is far too costly in a world that values speed.

But to mirror Jesus is to step under the colonnades of someone else's long-term suffering. It means refusing to let people become part of the background scenery of our lives.

We are surrounded by people who feel like they have "no one to help them." They are the ones who have been waiting for the waters to stir, watching everyone else get ahead while they stay glued to their mat of grief, loneliness, or failure.

Mirroring Jesus doesn't mean we fix all the problems in other people's lives. It simply starts with the willingness to stop, to look at someone whom society has long since filtered out, and to learn their story.

It's choosing to see the soul behind the struggle—reminding them that even if the rest of the world rushes past, they are truly seen by you.

But more importantly, they are seen by the Divine who delights kneeling in the dust.

