

The Gospel of John

The Setting

In the heart of the Jewish religious ceremonies of Jerusalem, during arguably one of the most populated times of the year surrounding many biblical feasts; we discover Jesus by a pool known as Bethesda. This pool has been located with the help of more recently found scrolls found within the Qumran caves in the Judean Desert. This pool as a public bath, was standard in Greco-Roman communities. Many people would often be located and congregated around the baths. To grasp how many people were around the bath we must know its size. Commonly these pools, or baths could have been as large as a football field! In this case, the particular pool was approximately “165-220 feet wide by 315 feet long” and roughly 20 feet deep! *(Side Note: despite John’s Gospel being written much later than the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, his recollection by today’s evidence was historically and remarkably accurate!)*



Jesus' Word Gives Life

It is fair to wonder why so much of John’s Gospel goes into specific detail of the setting, location, and the linear story of chapter five. However John’s purpose was to establish a strong thesis, the Jesus’ words give life. In this introduction we are told that “one man who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.” (Vs. 5) Including the length of time demonstrated the nothing has aided this man! Until, Jesus.

“He (Jesus) said to him, ‘do you want to be healed?’” (Vs. 6)

As Jesus sees the man, he knows within that the man has “already been there for a long time.” (vs. 6) Why is this important that Jesus knows this and John included this? Because knowing that the man has been beside the pool for a long time signified that the man had a long desire to be healed! The man responds to Jesus in such a way that we discover the complex tapestry of his circumstances. “I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I’m going, another steps before me.” (Vs. 7) This man was suffering not only physically, but also emotionally as he now has grown into self-pity due to his ailment!

the problem ... the miracle ... and now, the reaction

John 5:8

“Jesus said to him, ‘get up, take your bed, and walk.’”

Jesus’ healing this man broke various social norms and expected practices of the religious community. They were outraged at a man who in the heart of “their” city, was performing miracles. Now he has told a man to pick up his things and walk! Despite the miraculous wonder of a man being healed that the community (even the religious leaders) knew for many years had passed by, they failed to see the sign! Instead the authorities were angered and let their rage grow into a desire to kill Jesus. (Vs. 18) *(Jewish law had become so perverted and distorted by man, that by the time of this interaction, Jewish law forbid carrying anything on the Sabbath! Adding to their frustrations against Jesus’ instructions)*

“He (Jesus) was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.” (Vs. 18)

The ultimate charge against Jesus is that the authorities perceived Jesus’ statements and actions to be indirect statements as to being equal to God. This in their view, was regarded as completely blasphemous! However that is not what Jesus implied, Jesus did not make any claims that regarded himself in their view of equality which meant independence! *(Jewish perspective: equality=independence)* In fact the entirety of the rest of the chapter is a long monologue of Jesus’ rebuttal to their claims beginning in verse 19 where stated “the Son can do **nothing** of his own accord, only what he sees the Father doing.”

We can see evidence to support Jesus' rebuttal. In the Fourth Gospel alone, "the Son is portrayed dependent on the Father: for the gift of the Holy Spirit (3:34), for testimony (5:37), for disciples (6:37), for his message (7:16), for his mission (7:28), for knowledge (8:16), for guidance (11:9), for instructions (14:31), for authority (17:2), and for glory (17:24)" We see in every example a willful submission of the Son.

A Miracle Misunderstood

After the intense conflict in Jerusalem, some time later Jesus later departs across the "sea of Galilee." (otherwise lake of Galilee by non-galileans) We read that a large crowd followed because they saw the signs (plural) he was doing among the sick. Once again Jesus knowing the outcome, in verse 6 asks Phillip a question concerning feeding all of the people. After the disciples responded that 200 days worth of bread

would not be enough to feed the people, Jesus miraculously intervened. A boy was brought by the disciples to Jesus who had five simple loaves of barley and two fish, Jesus used this to feed the entire multitude with leftovers filling twelve baskets, in other words all that they could carry! The response of the people was a devastating blow to Jesus' intentions, "this indeed is a prophet who is come into the world!" They attempted to take him by force where he fled and they soon followed after. Their expectation stemmed from long Jewish teachings that inappropriately assumed that in their future God would once again send down Manna as he did in the wilderness and furthermore establish a kingdom when the Messiah came. (Ex. 16:1-36; Num. 11:4-9; 21:5; Deut. 8:3, 16; Josh. 5:12; Neh. 9:15, 20; Ps. 78:23-25; 105:40) Jesus' intent was once again not received, and out of frustration he fled where they would follow him and he would describe their error and the revelation of Himself not as one like Moses, but a better and truer Moses who Moses symbolized, bringing not Manna down from heaven, but embodying an eternal Manna that is freely given as eternal nourishment to those who accept him!



Conclusion

Jesus in these chapters provide us with an encouraging illustration. That he alone is our source of emotional, physical, and spiritual healing. Unlike the temporal manna that Jews remembered, Jesus offers a greater gift of eternal provision. If we draw near to God, we are explicitly told that he will draw near to us. In these chapters we are also illustrated correction and warning. We should never become so definitive in our expectations that if God manifests, that he can only do so within our confines as the authorities expected in chapter 5. Likewise we should never become so numb to the reality that our provision of eternal life is found in Jesus alone. In each of these chapters we see there is a reoccurring theme, the problem - the miracle - and the reaction. Jesus' mercy is fully displayed within these chapters despite the harsh objections by those who denied him as the Messiah.

1

READ

John 5-9

(Next week's Jn. 10-12)

2

REFLECT

On the pattern of Jesus' intent and our failure to see who he really is

3

RESPOND

This week encourage someone to discover the real, life-giving Jesus!

Discussion Questions

1. What did you learn that can be applied from this week's text?
2. Are you seeking healing?
3. What does Jesus being our provider mean for you personally as an individual?