

The Compassionate God

Jon Benzinger

John 5:1-9

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If you were to look out at our world, I don't think it would be hard for somebody to say, if there is a God, he has to be a monster. I mean, think about it. All the pain and tragedy. The senseless death and all the evil. I mean, how can God, who can stop it... How can God... He would want to stop all of that, right. If he's good, if he's loving, he would want to. He's powerful enough to do it, but it's still there. How is it possible that he could allow all of this? He must allow all the evil, and if he's even there, maybe he's allowing it because he can't stop it. Maybe he's allowing it because he doesn't want to stop and if he doesn't want to stop it, then he's got to be a monster. But what if God's answer to evil is, I became human that first Christmas to deal evil a death blow. One day I'm going to fix all evil, but right now the answer for evil is just wait. Just wait. Because, right now, what I'm doing is, I'm saving evildoers who trust in my son. But one day, the door of the ark will be closed. One day, it's all going to be wrapped up. I'm going to put an end to evil, and the question will be, where will you be on that day?

God has an answer to the problem of evil and the answer comes from a heart of compassion. I want you to hear. Psalm 145:9 puts it this way. "The Lord is good to all in spite of rebellion and his mercy or compassion is over all that he has made." Over all people. Compassion is God being moved by pity. To pity what he sees. To sympathize with us here on the earth. Psalm 103:13 compares the attitude of a father with his children to the way that God is with his people, saying, "As a father shows compassion to his children so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him." To his people, God promises... Isaiah 54:10... "The mountains may depart, and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you." It is more solid than the mountains you see around you. "My covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord who has compassion on you."

Then you see this compassion primarily with Christ, don't you? It says often in the gospels that, as he's looking out at the crowds, the thousands around him, he has compassion. Here's just one example. Matthew 9:36. It says, "When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed. They were helpless like sheep without a shepherd." No, far from being a monster, the God of the Bible, the only God that there is a God of compassion and that's what we see in our text today in John chapter 5. That Jesus is the compassionate God. He proves that he is the compassionate God by healing the man that we just read about together. He proves he's God by doing something only God can do, namely this miraculous healing and he proves that he's the compassionate God by healing a man that had been suffering from a crippling

disability for almost 40 years. We can see his compassion also in two things. We see it contrasted with the superstition of the day, which we'll talk about in a minute. Jesus is contrasted with this uncompassionate superstition and he's contrasted, we'll see next week, with the uncompassionate religious authorities at that day. He's a contrast to all of those things. Two of them lacking compassion, him being the God of compassion.

Now, before we get into the text though, I need to explain verse four. Okay? So, take a look at verse 4. You see it there? Yeah, there is no verse four. Just goes from verse three to five. Did somebody forget how to count? Is that what's happening? What's going on here? I think it would be good for you to know why you don't have, really, the end of verse 3 and all of verse 4 in your Bible. Now, in saying that, this is... I'm warning you. This is one of those nerd moments. It's not going to hurt, I promise. We'll get through this in a second. But this gives us an opportunity to explain something significant about our Bibles. Now, the significance is we don't have the originals. I don't know if you know that. We don't have the originals. What we have are thousands of copies of the originals. Those copies range in date from a few decades after pen was put to paper... Well, quill was put to paper... all the way to a thousand years after these books were written.

If you want to know more about this, I talked about in a message a few months ago called Why You Should Trust Your Bible. But anyway, there's a whole discipline of scholarship that takes all of these thousands of copies of the New Testament and compares all of them together to reconstruct what was originally written. When it comes to the Bible... when it comes to the number of copies, when it comes to the quality of the copies... these super brains on a stick kind of people say that they have over a 99% confidence that what you have in your New Testament is exactly what was written by the original authors. Over 99%. However, there is a less than one percent, a fraction of one percent, that these scholars are not confident about, and this text would be one of those, and notice they don't hide it. Like, gosh, I hope nobody sees this. No, they put it in brackets, or they give you a footnote to point you at the bottom to say, "Hey, our earliest manuscripts don't have this kind of stuff."

Now, if you have King James or New King James though, guess what? You do have verse 4. You have it right there in your Bible. And that's because the copies of the New Testament that went into the making of those translations had those verses in the text, and if you're like, well, what do the verses say? These verses help explain what this guy says in verse 7 by saying this. The sick people were there, quote, "waiting for the moving of the water because an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred the water. Whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had."

So why don't most of you have this in your Bible? Well, because at some point after John the Apostle wrote this book, somebody who was copying the Bible by hand came along and added the end of verse 3 and all of verse 4 to what John originally wrote. We know this by this. Because by the time... As time goes by, the more copies of John were found. They continue to find more ancient copies of the New Testament. They find better copies. Copies that are closer to

the time when John wrote. Copies that have less mistakes in them, and you know what they found? In the better copies of John that were closer when John wrote, they found that half of verse 3 and all verse 4 weren't there. In fact, there isn't a single copy of John before 400 AD that has these verses.

To summarize, should you have the end of verse 3 and all of verse 4 in your Bible? I think the answer is no. You shouldn't. How did it get there if John didn't write it? It was most likely a marginal note. Do you ever write stuff in your margin? What happened is this guy got a copy with this note in the margin and he thought it was helpful, so he just stuck it in the text. So now, you can understand what he means, this guy means, in verse 7 by this thing in the... taking the marginal note and putting it into the actual text of John. Does the end of verse 3 and all of verse 4 describe what God was actually doing at this pool or does this describe what people falsely thought God was doing at this pool?

Option number two I think is true. What is this? It's likely the popular superstitious belief of the day. That you could be healed at this pool if you were the first one in when the water starts to bubble a little bit because the bubbling means an angel has shown up from God to heal the first person to get in. Well, how did the water get stirred up then if you're saying it's not an angel? It's probably water coming into the pools from the reservoirs that fed these pools in the first place, not from an angel. Again, do I think people believed it was an angel? Absolutely. Do I think God was sending an angel to do that? I don't. Not because I don't believe in miracles, if you're like, oh, that guy doesn't believe in miracles. No, I do. I totally do. I just don't think an angel was doing that, and the reason I don't is because there's not a single teaching or example in the rest of the Bible of this kind of thing. Number one and number two. I think this whole thing is blasphemy against God. I mean, how mean would God be to only heal the first one in the pool? Oops! A little faster next time, guy that can't walk. Oh, you didn't see that it was all stirred up because you don't have eyes. Oh, sorry for that. You're blind. My bad. Stinks for you. You should have seen that. That's not a god of compassion at all. One author call this, if true, a cruel contest for the most in need of hope people alive at the time.

So why are all these sick people at this place? Well, because of this superstition and because water is thought to have healing properties, right? Desert Hot Springs, California has seven natural pools that people have been going to for centuries because they believe this water will heal them. There's another one in Hot Springs, Arkansas. A whole national park has grown up over this thing there. So, did people actually get healed in this place? Maybe. I mean, do people get healed at the hot springs? Do they people feel better after sitting in a hot tub or going swimming? Do people use cold therapy sitting in buckets of ice in order to feel better? They do, right? Could it be demonic forces pushing the superstitious deception? Could it be a placebo effect? Could it be shots of adrenaline? It could be all of those things, but for millennia, water has been used as therapeutic. Many people still use it and believe it today all over the world. So, we can't be too quick to fault hundreds of superstitious people gathered around the pool of

Bethesda that day. All right, nerd moment over. That's like a nerd five minutes, so more than a moment.

Next week, like I said, we'll see the lack of compassion of the religious leaders. We just talked about the lack of compassion of this superstition. Now, let's see the compassion of God starting in verse 1. "After this, there was a feast of the Jews and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now, there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate, a pool in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these, lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, and paralyzed." Let's jump into this text under the heading point #1) *The Destitute Masses. The Destitute Masses.* As we entered chapter 5, we've entered after an unknown period of time. Maybe as much as a year and a half has passed since the period at the end of chapter 4. Jesus has been a hundred miles north in the region called Galilee, north of Jerusalem, where many of the things in the early chapters of Matthew, Mark, and Luke took place.

So, this is the time in between the period and the beginning of chapter 5 is the time when Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount and he healed the demon possessed guy in Capernaum and he healed Peter's mother-in-law and he was training the 12. So doing all this healing and all of that all over Galilee. That that was during this... in between the period and the beginning of chapter 5. This is the second time Jesus is in Jerusalem. First time was in chapter two where he cleaned out the temple and talked to Nicodemus. Notice verse 1, he is there to celebrate the feast of the Jews, but John doesn't tell us which one. There is all kinds of speculation. I won't do any of that.

But what I want you to see is verse 2. That in the northeastern part of the city by a place called the sheep gate where people would bring their sheep into the city to be sacrificed, there was a pool. For centuries, skeptics of the Bible argued that whoever wrote the book of John clearly doesn't know Jerusalem and doesn't know what it was like at the time because no one's ever heard of this pool with a name like this and no one has ever found this pool. Until 1881, when they found this pool. Exactly where John says it was. Exactly as John said it would be. With five roofed colonnades that people would sit under next to the pool. You know why archeologists found it there? Because this is history. It's not myth, legend, or fantasy, that's why.

So, picture a long rectangle like my pulpit here about the size of a football field. Colonnade has raised columns and then a roof over it. Picture that and then one down the middle. Creating two pools on either side, and then I want you to picture sick people all over the place. Hundreds of them. Hundreds and hundreds of them. Notice verse 3 says a multitude. Since it's a holiday, it could be thousands. That pool in verse 2 is name Bethesda, which means the house of mercy, that's what all these people were hoping for, right? They were hoping for God to be merciful to them and heal them. That's because, verse three, they were invalids. Blind, lame, and paralyzed.

These words paint a picture of utter devastation. Everywhere your eye would fall, you would see infirmity, pain, incapacity, disease. People who can't see. People who can't hear. People whose limbs don't function anymore. Like this man, some people that had been that way for years. Decades. What you see, the picture, the sounds, the smells, were probably unbearable at this place. To see this, the more sensitive among us would be moved to tears. At bodies racked by

pain and all the helplessness of people slumped all around the edges of this massive pool, and then I want you to think about Jesus. Didn't go to the elite neighborhoods. Didn't go to where all everybody was clean and rich and healthy. He went to the dregs. The absolute pathetic, scummy residue of his society. That's where he goes. Why? Because he's not repulsed, and he's not disgusted by these destitute masses. He went to the hundreds and maybe even thousands of disabled, hopeless people because He is the compassionate God.

Now, look at verse 5. As the scene focuses down on one man. Verse 5. One man was there who had been an invalid for 38 years. "When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, 'Do you want to be healed?' The sick man answered him, 'Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I'm going, another steps down before me.'" Let's consider this text under the heading, point #2) ***The Hopeless Man. The Hopeless Man.*** Notice he doesn't even have a name. He's just one man. Who he is not what's important at this moment. What is important is what his problem is, and what is important is how long he has had this problem. From verse seven, it's clear that this is likely a disability that at least makes him weak, if not making him lame and crippled and even paralyzed, and he's been that way for 38 years. That's like going from healthy to paralyzed in 1984 and suffering with that night and day every day since then.

I mean, I don't like getting a scratch. I couldn't handle kidney stone pain back in September. I had excruciating back pain last month. This was 38 years. Over 450 months. Almost 14000 days. Over 300000 hours. Almost 20 million minutes of dealing with this. Being paralyzed after knowing what it's like to be whole. In fact, I read multiple scholars this week who said 38 years was longer than most ancient people stayed alive. For this guy, rather than dying, he suffered year after year, decade after decade, hoping one day, he would get into that pool at just the right time to be healed, and then add to that, this was 2000 years ago. Before hygiene and modern medicine and sanitation. Then add to that the religious context that would say, if you're suffering, it's your fault. You must have sinned egregiously for God to do that to you. You want to talk about hopeless? This is hopeless, and it would've been hopelessness for 38 years with a hopeless disability. Then, in verse 7, you hear his hopeless desperation. Why? Because there's nobody there to help him. There's not a single person that cares. Everyone else is there like him to get healed. So there's nobody there that's there to help him get healed. Why? Because I want that healing for me, not you. This is utter devastation and into this hopelessness steps Jesus.

Notice verse 6. It says, "First Jesus," verse 6, "saw him." Then it says, verse 6, Jesus knew him. That he'd been there a time. Well, how did Jesus know this? Maybe he asked him. Or he could have been famous. Maybe everybody knew this guy. We don't know. But since chapter 1, we do know that there have been multiple times so far in the book of John that Jesus has supernatural knowledge about people, knowledge he shouldn't have. Then chapter 2:24 says, Jesus, quote, "knew all people," which would include this man, and I want you to notice Jesus, not the man, took initiative for him to be healed. Do you see that? It's not like other times where people know

who Jesus is and say, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me and heal me." No, not this guy. He doesn't see that at all. Jesus takes the initiative and says to him, "Do you want to be healed?"

Do you want to be healed? That's an interesting question. It's hard to know why Jesus would ask that question, and there's no end of speculation. Maybe it's a real question. Oh, it's kind of obvious. He's there. Maybe Jesus was just starting a conversation. Hey, do you want to be healed? Maybe that would lead to something else. Maybe the question is a way of offering to heal him. Hey, do you want to be healed? Because I can do that for you. Maybe Jesus is planting a sense of expectation in his soul. One author put it this way. He said, Beggars made a better living than the day laborers, so this is a real question. Hey, do you want to give up your small business in order to be healed? I don't think that's what it was. Maybe the question was meant to get him to express just how hopeless he was because that's how he responds to the question.

Verse 7 one more time. He said, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool..." I'm all alone here, "and while I'm going, another steps down before me." Here is this man. Bound by superstition. No friends, no family, to help him. Constantly missing out on his healing because he is not able to get in there the exact right time. Completely without the compassion of others and he expresses here in verse 7 just how hopeless he is. What I think this man is doing in verse 7 is saying, "I have no one to put me in the pool, will you help me? Well Jesus, the compassionate God is going to do one better than that, right? Look at verse 8. "Jesus said to him, get up, take up your bed, and walk. And at once the man was healed and he took up his bed and walked."

When summarized, these verses under the heading, *The Compassionate Messiah. The Compassionate Messiah*. Old Testament says when the Messiah comes... Isaiah 35:6. It says, quote, "the lame will leap like a deer." Zephaniah 3:19 says, the Messiah will, quote, "save the lame and change their shame into praise." In Matthew chapter 11, John the Baptist sends his friends, his disciples, to go talk to Jesus because they're not sure if he's really the Messiah. So they come to him, are you the Messiah? The proof that he gives that he is the messiah is he says, quote, "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk." One of the lame that he may have been referring to, was this very man.

Think about it. At Jesus' words, muscles, tendons, ligaments, and bones, long unused and atrophied, suddenly come to life and fill with strength. Vitality surges throughout his entire body. Can you imagine the feelings that flooded his heart as he's watching limbs strengthen and muscles grow? He received divine power to do what he was previously unable to do, and with these three commands, came the ability required to perform these commands. What excitement he must have felt as he stood up and balanced his entire body for the first time and, in decades, picks up his flat straw mat, rolled it up, put it on his back, and started walking. With legs and feet and ankles and toes that suddenly work once again. This is incredible for him.

Now, I want you to notice nine things about this healing. Nine things, and I want you to notice it in contrast to the flood of charlatans, the massive wolves in sheep's clothing, all over the world who pretend to be Christian ministers with fake power, fake miracles, and fake healings. I want

you to notice how this text, just this short text, completely deconstructs that entire ruse that's being played on millions of people today. First, this healing was instant. In verse 9, it says at once. There's not progression where he grew stronger and stronger. This healing was immediate. Second, it was complete. Notice he was healed. Done. As evidenced by this man being able to get up, pick up his bed, and walk away. So, it's not a partial healing that was only good for a while and just kind of faded away. No, not this... third... is real. This man was really disabled. This wasn't a fake, this wasn't a trick. This was real. Everybody knew it. He was really healed. This isn't a fake magic trick by some charlatan. This is history.

Fourth, it was unexpected. Why? He was hoping that Jesus would put him in the pool. He had no idea that Jesus was there to heal him, at all. Fifth, there's no intermediary needed. There's the healing didn't come from some priest or prophet or pastor or anyone else. It came directly from Jesus. Sixth, to a guy who didn't even know who Jesus was. In verse 10, the religious authorities come to him and say, hey, who told you to carry your mat? You shouldn't be carrying that. He said, "I don't know. The guy who healed me said, 'Take up your bed and walk.'" Verse 12. "They asked him, 'Who is the man who said you take up your bed and walk?'" Verse 13. "Now, the man who had been healed did not know who it was. He didn't know who Jesus was, and yet he got healed, which means... seventh... this healing did not depend on what? This man's faith. He had faith in the pool. He did not have faith in Jesus. He was hoping Jesus would put him in the pool. He had faith in the superstition about the pool. He did not have faith in Jesus, and yet he was healed anyway.

Eighth, the healing was obvious. It wasn't a secret. It wasn't hidden, and ninth and finally, the healing was sovereign. Again, who took the initiative to heal this man? Oh, that's right. It was Jesus. The man didn't come to Jesus. Jesus came to him and healed him. This text shows the utter delusion and wicked deception of the so-called faith healers in this country and all around the world. His healing was immediate, not gradual. It was complete, not partial and, oh, it was free. It was free. Didn't cost him anything either. It was not the result of overactive expectation. He had no expectations. It was not the result of an abundance of faith because he had no faith. It wasn't even the result of faith in Jesus at all because the healing of this man was the result of the compassionate power of God. So, Christians, after meditating on this text, I hope that remembering the compassion of Jesus encourages you with whatever it is that you're facing today. Like the man in verse 6, he sees you. Like the man in verse 6, he knows you. Like the man in verse 6, he's there unlike the man in verse 7, go to him. Trust in him. He knows. He knows.

Now, God's compassion isn't just for physical affliction. It's for spiritual affliction as well. The destitution of people whose lives have been racked by the impact of sin. In Luke 15 is the famous story of the prodigal son, where God is pictured as the father of a wayward boy who's become destitute and hopeless because of his sin. Things got so bad that he decided he'd return to his father's house just hoping the father would let him be a slave. However, Luke 15:20 says that, when the father sees the son from a far distance, it says, quote, "the father saw him and felt compassion." Jesus says that's what it's like in heaven. When one sinner comes to repentance,

when one sinner is forgiven, what is it that moves the heart of God to forgive sinners? His compassion.

So, like the man at the pool that day, John 5:6, just one person in a sea of repulsive destitution... Like the man that day, he sees you personally. Like this man, he sees what you're going through. He's not unaware. He's not ignoring you or uncaring about you. He sees the pain and the struggles. He sees what no one else sees, and John 5:6 again, like the man of the pool that day, he also knows you. He knows the past. He knows the present. He knows the poor decisions. He knows the sinful behaviors. He knows the wicked justifications. He knows the pain; and like the man that day, Jesus is not repulsed by the destitution that your sin has caused, but he comes to you in your sin, in your doubt, in your regret, guilt and shame, and like the man at the pool, he looks at you seeing everything, knowing everything, and says to you, "Do you want to be healed?" Do you want to be healed? Do you want to be healed from the penalty you deserve for all of your sins? Do you want to be healed from the power that sin has over your life? Do you want to be forgiven? Do you want to be made clean? Do you want to be made whole? Do you want to know the peace of God flooding your entire life that surpasses all understanding? Do you want to know what it is to be adopted into God's family? No longer a stranger, no longer an enemy, no longer a rival, but a son, a child, even an heir? Do you want that?

Well, unlike the man at that pool, you must believe in Jesus, you must. You must turn from everything that would keep you from him. The opinions of others or your own ideas or your trust in some organization or some person, some profit, whatever it is. You must be done with all of that, and you must come to him like a child and trust Him and Him alone and He will forgive you of everything because He is the compassionate God.

Consider the words of this promise in Isaiah 55. It says, "Seek the Lord while he may be found." That's right now. "Call on him while he is near." That's now. That's today. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts." Again, anything that would keep you from him, forsake them. "Let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon." Abundant pardon. Not partial pardon. Not mostly pardon. Abundant, generous, lavish pardon. That's what the compassionate God offers you. Pardon for all of your sins. Jesus is and always will be the compassionate God for all who will come to him. So, will you come to him and be healed from all of your sins? Let's pray.

Jesus, it is easy to look out into the larger world and it is easy to look at our lives and wonder if you have compassion for us. It is texts like this one that either teach us or remind us that, if you would be compassionate to this man, then you would be compassionate to us. It's not the debilitating disability that this man had that is repulsive, but our sin is repulsive, and yet, like this man, you take the initiative. You come to us through your word even now and say, 'Do you want to be healed? Some within the sound of my voice here and watching, I pray that they would say yes, and they would give their lives to you. They would trust in you. Nothing would stand in their way. For the rest of us who have said yes, we want to be healed. Forgive us of our sins. We trust in you, and the rest of us, may this reminder, may these truths, about your compassion give

us help, give us hope, give us strength in the week ahead. I pray these things for the glory of your name. Amen.