

Bethesda is the name of the pool of water at the temple in Jerusalem. It's a good name. It means *House of Grace*. According to some Greek manuscripts of St. John's Gospel, at certain times an angel would come down and stir up the waters, and the first person to enter the troubled waters would be healed of whatever disease they had.

No wonder John tells us that around this pool, not a few, but a multitude of invalids have gathered; blind, lame, paralyzed. They have come to be healed. But only one of them will receive the healing. The one who can outmaneuver the others to the pool as soon as the waters are stirred up.

This is not the time, apparently, to give to another your place in line. Not the time to be caring and tender-hearted toward your neighbor. Rather, it's the time to think only of yourself. To bull your way through and be the first into the water because, here at this pool, the winner takes all.

We meet a man in our text who has been an invalid for thirty-eight years. For thirty-eight years he has been trying to be the first to enter the pool. But he is always too slow. And he has no one to help him. For thirty-eight years, whenever he would see the waters being stirred up, he would muster whatever strength he had and crawl to the pool, but never in time. Some whippersnapper would always get there before him.

Not only could he not be healed of his disease, don't you think he had developed an attitude over the years? Anger, bitterness, resentment, and also despair and hopelessness. Even though those who had been healed would not be back at the water's edge, there were always more invalids to replace them; always more of the blind, lame, and paralyzed to compete for the prize.

The picture we see here in our text is, in truth, a picture of our world in general. This is a broken world. The effects of sin are everywhere. Not only do we see invalids wherever we go, we are all, in a sense, invalids. We are all weak and injured. If not physically, then emotionally or spiritually. And wherever we go we see that "me-first" attitude. The constant striving to outdo others for the prize, whatever the prize might be. And if we are honest, we would admit that attitude exists also within us.

Now in our text, on a certain Sabbath Day, everything changed for this invalid when Jesus came to Bethesda. Now it was truly the House of Grace. He did not come to stir up the waters. But He did come with a gracious purpose in mind. "*Do you want to be healed?*" He asked the invalid. In the Greek, "*Do you want to become whole?*" Not just healed...whole. The stirred-up waters of the pool could heal, but they could not make an invalid whole. To be whole is to be healed in both body and soul. To be healthy, pure, sound, without fault.

This poor invalid could not envision such a blessing. He could see only his diseased body and the healing waters which were always beyond his reach. He does not even reply, "Yes!" to Jesus' question. "Yes, I want to be whole!" To his mind, the only help for him is the pool of Bethesda. Yet a house of grace is hardly grace when that grace is always withheld from those in need. Maybe this man speaking to him by the water's edge will help him into the water once it is

stirred up. But Jesus Himself is the water of life. The water that makes one whole. And to this invalid Jesus says, *“Get up, take up your bed, and walk!”* *“And immediately,”* we’re told, *“the man became whole, and he took up his bed and began to walk.”*

Jesus made this invalid whole, healing him of his disease and forgiving him of his sins. We see this clearly a few verses later where Jesus says to him, *“See, you have become whole! Sin no longer that nothing worse may happen to you.”*

Do you see how absolutely vital it was for this man that in all those thirty-eight years he did not receive a healing from the pool? Was not God preventing him from being the first into the waters? *“I have no one to help me,”* he complained. Oh yes you do! God is helping you. He, for thirty-eight years, has been keeping you from the pool that gives healing so that Jesus could make you whole in both body and soul.

Today you, my friends, are back at the water’s edge. For truly this is Bethesda, the House of Grace. No angel comes here to grant physical healing. Jesus comes here to make sinners whole. Today He asks you, *“Do you want to become whole?”* Has this world been troubling you? Has disease been afflicting you? Have relationships soured? Those who are of the world do not want to be made whole. They want only to be healed of whatever makes them weak and injured. And so, the world does not want Jesus, because Jesus makes us whole. The world wants the stirred-up waters. But such water without Christ is no true baptism. When Jesus comes to the water, it is baptism, it is the water of life which makes us whole.

Do you understand, yet, why God, for however many years, perhaps thirty-eight, perhaps more or less, has been preventing you from being the first into the pool? For if you received healing for whatever makes you weak and injured, you would not want Jesus. You would not care about being made whole. You would hardly give thought to your baptism into Christ; about returning to these waters of life daily.

Jesus came to our world to be tossed into the troubled waters; to be thrown onto the cross. He who was whole became broken for us, that by His death and resurrection, He is able to make us whole.

And so, to you my friend, Jesus says, *“Rise, take up your pallet, and walk!”* And He lifts you up out of your sins, forgiving you. And He grants you, in your baptism, to walk with Him in the resurrected life. You are whole. There is no fault that God sees in you. All is forgiven. You are forgiven.

And your sickness, your disability? It has the gracious purpose of keeping you weak and injured so that you faithfully come here to the House of Grace where Jesus continues to make you whole. Amen.